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photographed by Peter Yang

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José O. Padrón

Hand

Crafted

1964

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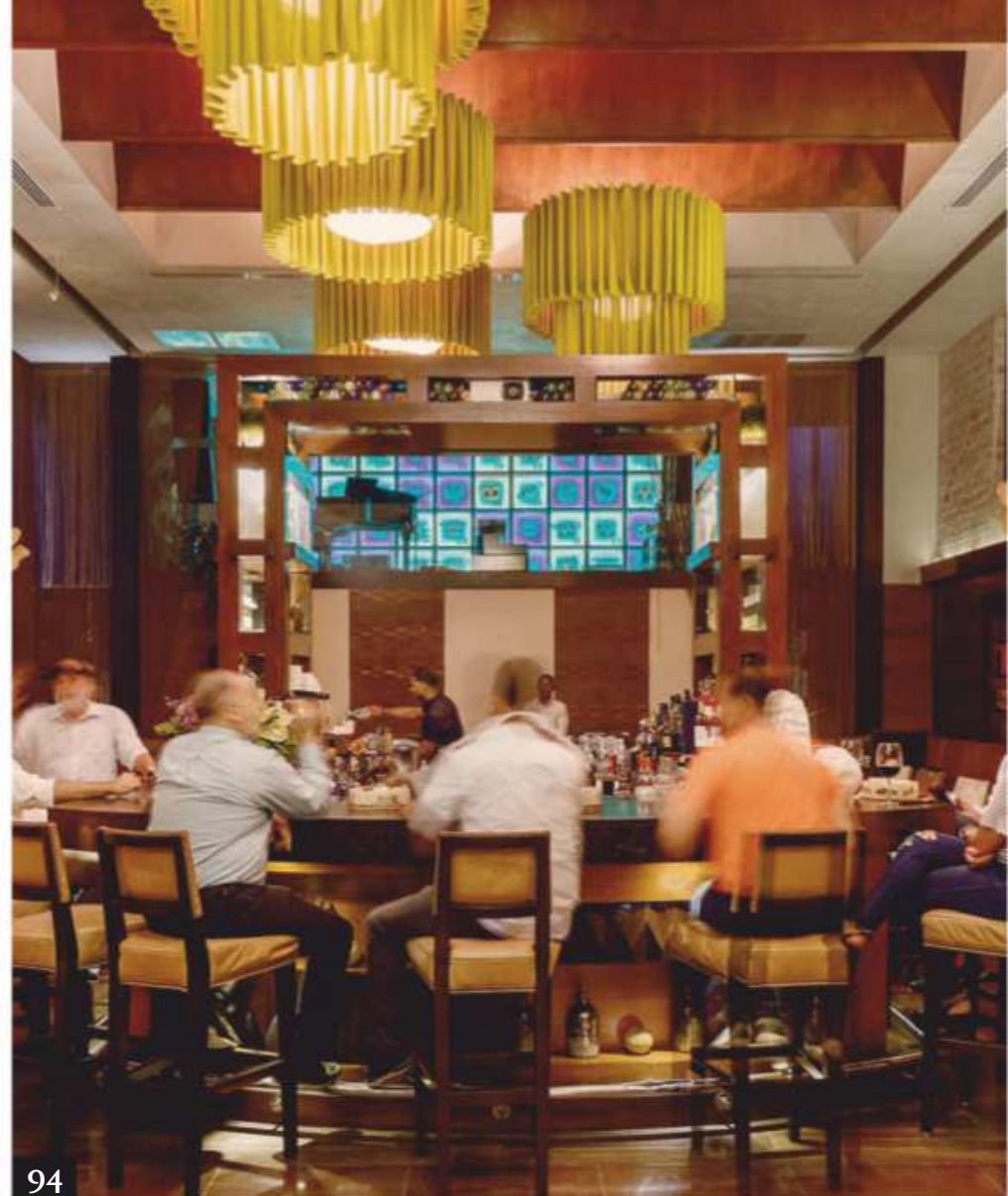
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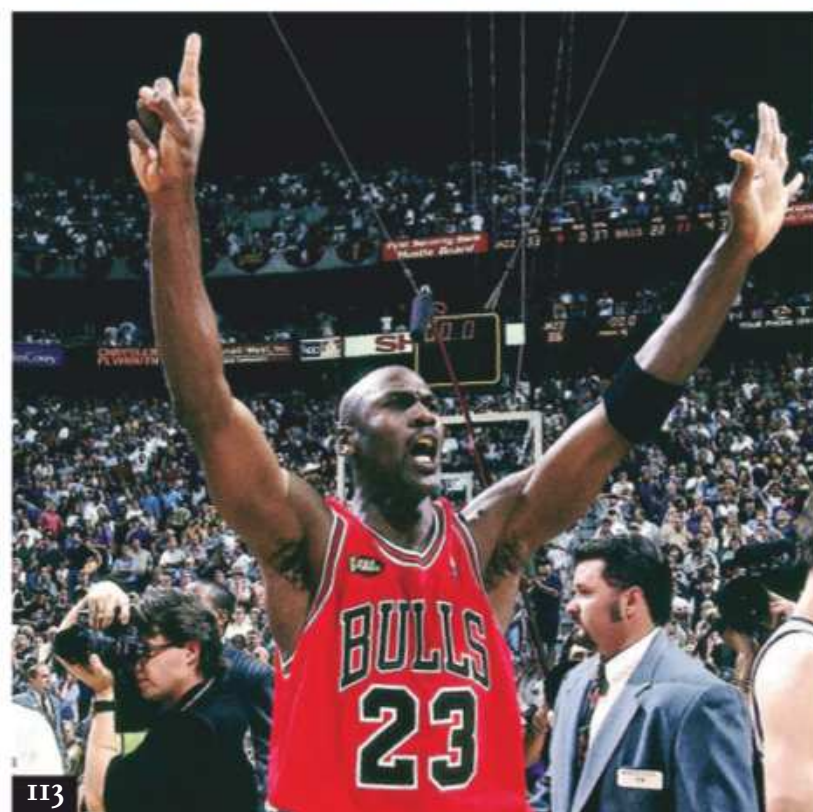
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highlights

What a showing for Nicaragua—the Central American country led (or tied) four of our six size categories in this tasting. And what a tasting: 31 cigars scored 90 points or more, plus a 95 pointer—classic on our 100-point scale. Price-conscious shoppers will also be happy to see that many of these outstanding smokes retail for less than \$10.



TOP FIGURADO

FLOR DE LAS ANTILLAS BELICOSO

This shapely smoke, rolled entirely with Nicaraguan tobaccos, was first released in 2012 as the Garcia family's tribute to Cuba's cigar heritage.

NICARAGUA

95



TOP CORONA

CASA CUBA DOBLE TRES

Rollled in the Dominican Republic as one of the last blends from Carlos Fuente Sr., this smoke tied with the American-made La Colmena Amado No. 44 for best corona.

DOM. REP.

93



TOP ROBUSTO

CHARTER OAK CT SHADE ROTHSCCHILD

A love letter to Connecticut, brand owner Nick Melillo's home state, this smoke wears a rare Connecticut Shade wrapper and only costs \$5.

NICARAGUA

93



TOP CORONA GORDA

RAMON ALLONES BY AJ FERNANDEZ TORO

This Nicaraguan puro tied with the Cuban Hoyo de Monterrey Le Hoyo de San Juan and the San Cristobal Quintessence.

NICARAGUA

92



TOP GRANDE

ROOM101 FARCE IT IS A MAGNUM

A curiously named smoke from Matt Booth rolled with an Ecuadoran wrapper, Indonesian binder and filler from three countries.

DOM. REP.

92



TOP CHURCHILL

NAT CICCICO ANIVERSARIO 1965 LIGA NO. 4 CHURCHILL

This Nicaraguan-made cigar tied with the La Aurora 1903 Cameroon and a limited-edition Cuban made exclusively for Hong Kong.

NICARAGUA

91



BEST BUY

GILBERTO OLIVA RESERVA BLANC 5.75X43

Enrobed in a golden-brown Ecuadoran Connecticut wrapper, this exquisitely rolled corona retails for a mere \$5.75.

NICARAGUA

92

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There's nothing quite like it—visiting a country where cigars are made. You can walk through tobacco fields and tour cigar factories, witness tobacco being harvested and cigars being rolled. You'll never forget the alluring, sweet and earthy aroma of a room filled with aging tobacco, nor the sound of the rolling gallery as hundreds of pairs of hands turn leaves into beautiful cigars. It should have a place on every cigar lover's bucket list.

Longtime readers are familiar with our frequent profiles of Cuba, the birthplace of the handmade cigar. But you've never seen anything like what awaits you in these pages—our extensive travel guide to the Dominican Republic.

Cigars have been rolled in the Dominican Republic for more than a century, and this Caribbean country has been at the forefront of handmade cigar production for years.

The Dominican Republic has some of the world's finest golf courses, ideal weather for wintertime travel and a cigar-friendly atmosphere that's hard to match.

Both of us have been to the Dominican Republic many, many times, and we've come to love our trips there. We've also watched this country grow and become ever more welcoming to travelers. When we first came to Santiago, the city where most Dominican cigars are made, it was rustic, with lackluster hotel rooms and few places to dine. Today, there are several exceptional restaurants,

as well as better places to stay. The capital city of Santo Domingo has exceptional cigar lounges, as well as a long and storied history. Punta Cana, once a quiet city on the northeastern coast of the Dominican Republic, has grown into a tourist mecca. And farther west, in a town called Playa Grande, the resort group Aman has crafted a property designed to coddle even the most discerning travelers to this 2,000-acre site with its emphasis on privacy. Our coverage begins on page 70.

This issue has much more to offer. The story of Tiger Woods' unlikely comeback from injury. A primer on making superb cocktails for the holidays. The compelling final acts by some of the biggest names in the history of sports. An expert's guide through the finest tobacco farms in Cuba. And finally, our story about one of our favorite people in the world, the legendary actor Danny DeVito, appearing on the cover of CIGAR AFICIONADO for the second time. His story—and his attitude—are certain to bring a smile to your face.

Enjoy the issue.

MARVIN R. SHANKEN
EDITOR & PUBLISHER

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NICARAGUA

LIGERO

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Rated
91



Experiencia
La Crema

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90



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out of the humidor

Dear Marvin,

I enjoyed your wide-ranging interview with Alex Rodriguez in the October CIGAR AFICIONADO. For someone as well-known as A-Rod, it was surprisingly full of revealing insights. If Hall of Fame voters had the opportunity to read the interview, I believe A-Rod's chances of joining the Hall would greatly increase.

Rich Foley

Fayette, Ohio

Dear Marvin,

It's been super interesting to see the way public perception of Alex Rodriguez has changed the past couple of years. In his playing days, he seemed to suffer from comparisons to Derek Jeter, despite being the superior player. I always felt like he came in for a bit too much flak.

Since then, there's been a reversal of fortunes with Jeter's Marlins ownership getting a ton of criticism, while A-Rod has been a huge hit as a broadcaster.

Dan Hester

Fremont, California

Dear Marvin,

I'm a new subscriber to CIGAR AFICIONADO, and I enjoy reading each issue cover to cover. I particularly found the "Living the Dream" article [August 2018] about Matthew McConaughey interesting. He has a very honest, no-nonsense work ethic that suits his lifestyle and good moral standards. He seems to enjoy the challenges of his craft and seems genuinely involved in all his undertakings. I respect his confidence and outlook on life and family. I particularly like the fact that he enjoys a good cigar and Bourbon on occasion. As do I.

James Farrant

Belford, New Jersey

Editors' Response: As do we. Welcome.

Dear Marvin,

I was so pleased to read the article "The Cowboy Hat" [Good Life Guide, August 2018] that I decided to write and add my two cents. For full disclosure, I am from Wyoming—lots of cowboy hats here!



"It's been super interesting to see the way public perception of Alex Rodriguez has changed the past couple of years."

—*Dan Hester, Fremont, California*

Anybody can wear a baseball cap; where is the style in that? And backwards? Please! As the article stated, get some professional guidance. Go to a good hat store, or any big rodeo, like Cheyenne Frontier Days. Get some expert advice—they will tell you if it looks good or not. Be confident that you can pull it off, don't feel dumb. I assure you, all of your friends may tease you a bit, but deep down, they will be envious because they wish they could wear one.

You don't have to be a cowboy to wear a cowboy hat but it will surely make you feel like one. Not everyone can be from Wyoming, but you can all feel like a Wyoming cowboy the moment you put your hat on.

Scott Ostlund

Gillette, Wyoming

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Dear Marvin,

I am writing to thank you for publishing your fabulous Churchill issue [June 2018], both for its tribute to the most interesting man to walk the earth and also for the excellent article titled “Did He Really Smoke That Much?” I was fortunate some years ago to have lunch in London, Ontario, with the official Churchill biographer, a wonderful man, Sir Martin Gilbert. During a delightful lunch I specifically asked him about Churchill’s cigar smoking habit. His answer puzzled me, as he indicated that Churchill didn’t smoke cigars, that cigars were merely a prop for the unique image that Sir Winston wished to present to the world. I wondered whether this indeed could be true or whether Sir Martin was simply attempting to discourage me from indulging in my own personal enjoyment of one of life’s greatest pleasures. After reading your article, recounting how Churchill purchased 825 cigars during one six-month period in 1964 in the year before he died, and then how his collection had significantly dwindled by the time of his passing, I can only reasonably conclude that he had to have consumed them.

Thank you for setting the record straight for me and for the cigar-loving world.

Dan Mailer

London, Ontario, Canada

Dear Marvin,

We have made many friends in Cuba. Their diet appears healthy, but even simple things like fish oil are not available. On our last trip, we carried in over 30 pounds of vitamins and supplements, all impossible to find in a country that cannot keep toilet paper in stock. If you go anywhere else in the Caribbean you find the World Hunger Organization, Feed the Children and hundreds of American Missionaries and their money. Cuba has no one, but they don’t beg and they don’t steal. They are proud people, survivors of the regime, survivors of the hunger, survivors of the hurricanes. I don’t care about their politics or our policies. My concern is for the proudest people I have ever known, and a prayer that someone will crack the door and restore hope to the people.

Craig Smith

Odessa, Texas

Editors’ Response: We share your sentiments for the Cuban people, who have always been kind on our visits. The challenges they face are daunting. ❖

Correction In the October CIGAR AFICIONADO, the Good Life Guide article on Formula Experiences misstated the name of its location. It takes place at the Virginia International Raceway.

Hennessy

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Eric Newman (Third Generation), Drew Newman (Fourth Generation), and Bobby Newman (Third Generation) are standing on the rooftop of El Reloj, J.C. Newman's 108-year-old cigar factory in the Ybor City National Historic Landmark District in Tampa, Florida.

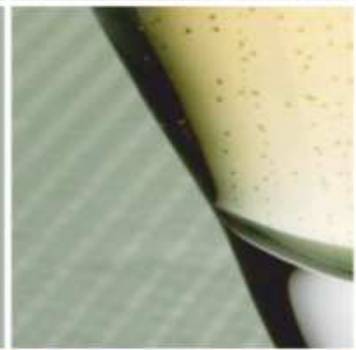


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good life guide

Living well demands that we indulge in things that are of superior quality and excellent origin. This guide aspires to find and recommend the best of everything to aficionados of the good life.

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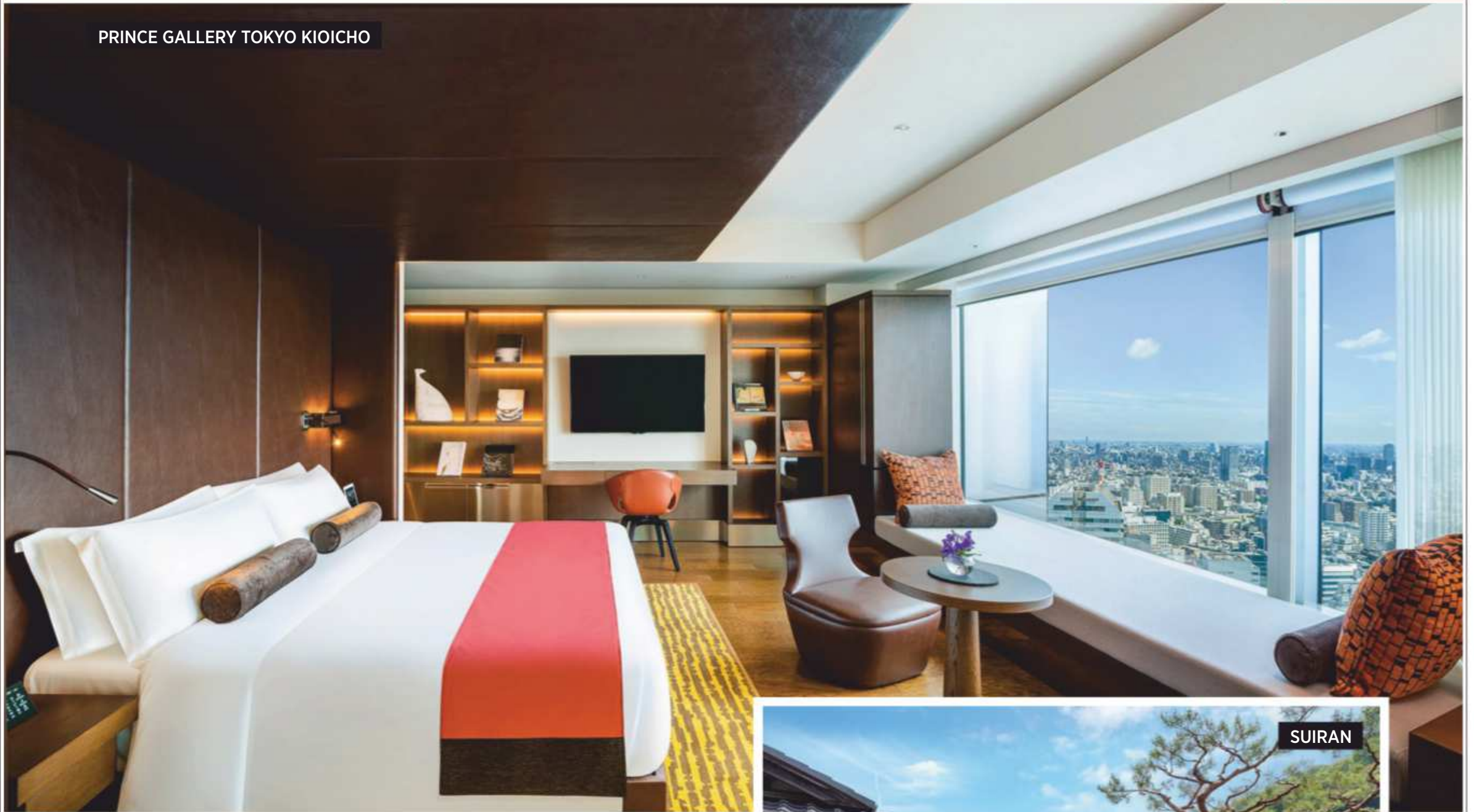
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Japan: Present and Past

Tokyo's vast skyline, its towers aglow with blinking red lights, fans out beneath the 33rd-floor windows of your room at the new Prince Gallery Tokyo Kioicho hotel. The mesmerizing urban landscape is the focal point of the design through spans of glass with a daybed in the window inviting you to contemplate the futuristic metropolis. And yet, in Kyoto, just a few hours to the southwest by bullet train, the same hotel collection presents Suiran, where Japan's ancient cultural traditions are still preserved and revered. Visitors can have the best of both eras.

In its way Kioicho leaves some of the frenetic buzz of Tokyo's pulsing streets solidly on terra firma as the 36th-floor reception area reveals an overlook of the dramatic two-story Levita lounge with the skyline beyond. The hotel occupies the skyscraper's top seven floors with two restaurants, a Kioi spa featuring an indoor swimming pool and fitness center and 250 rooms and suites designed to evoke residential apartments.

At the restaurant Washoku Souten you can indulge in traditional Japanese culinary delicacies, including melt-in-your-mouth blowfish. The chandeliers are designed to resemble the huge blocks of ice at the Tsukiji fish market, the seafood source for the refined omakase tasting menus presented on various plates with artistic flair. From there you head into the intimate Bar illumiid for a Japanese whisky and a cigar.



Until 1868, Kyoto was Japan's capital. It is still the seat of its cultural traditions. Behind an imposing wooden gate, Suiran occupies the pastoral grounds of a former royal palace. The peaceful sanctuary in the Arashiyama district combines antique and modern architecture with 39 guest rooms, some of which have private al fresco *onsens* (natural thermal hot tubs).

The Suiran staff is happy to immerse you in the ancient culture—from a rickshaw tour to an audience with a geisha to a private meditation session with a monk at the neighboring Tenryuji Temple, a World Heritage Site. Also nearby, the remarkable bamboo forest is an idyllic destination for a tranquil early-morning stroll before the crowds descend.

The two hotels are a unique opportunity to feel as if you have traveled centuries through time.

Visit princehotels.com/tokyo and suirankyoto.com

—Laurie Kahle



First-Class Fruitcake

You're to be forgiven if you think of fruitcake as a punch line rather than a culinary treat. We've all encountered that stale doorstep of a cake embedded with iridescent fruit that inspired the old joke: There's only one fruitcake on Earth and people endlessly regift it to each other.

Prepare to rethink this holiday tradition/terror. Today, there's an extremely refined version that even fruitcake haters will love. Robin McKay, a professional chef in New York's Hudson Valley, first attempted a fruitcake for her British boyfriend, himself a fruitcake connoisseur, and ended up taking it to a level that even Americans will appreciate. It's 100 percent natural. No preservatives of any kind. Not a single radioactive looking candied red or green cherry. The result is a dense flavor bomb, each slice containing a cornucopia of organic currants, flame raisins, figs, apricots, dates, roasted almonds, hazelnuts, as well as candied orange and lemon peel that McKay cures herself.

There are also eggs from local pastured hens, molasses, cane sugar and small-batch craft brandy—a cup of it in every cake. McKay says the fruitcake will keep fresh on your kitchen counter for one to three months. However, the chef recommends watering it occasionally with your own brandy or Bourbon. (You won't get any complaints here.)

The six-inch cake that weighs in at almost three pounds costs \$50—it's also available in a set of three 1-pound cakes for \$56. And no less an authority than Ruth Reichl, the food critic and bestselling author, described McKay's as "the fruitcake you've always longed for." But a loyal customer came up with this tagline that just might serve as the ultimate compliment when it comes to this beleaguered holiday treat: "The fruitcake you don't have to regift."

Visit robinskitchenview.com

—Ralph Gardner Jr.

JEFF HARRIS

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TOFFEE SWEETNESS

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Glenfiddich has long pushed boundaries and challenged traditions. Never has this been more evident than with Fire & Cane. It's a bold fusion of campfire smokiness with oak and peaty notes, finished in Latin rum casks to produce a surprising toffee sweetness.



2019 BMW 5-Series M5

While the 3-Series may be the most popular—read: financially attainable—BMW, the brand's heart and soul is in the 5-Series, a sedan that blends luxury and performance into one delightful package. At least it was until the last-generation 5-er seemed to lose a little bit of the passion that made it such a standout.

So it was with trepidation that auto scribes awaited the latest version of their midsize model, the 2019 BMW M5. Would it lack some of the crisp steering and handling of earlier models? Could any BMW really be an M if it swapped out the manual or double-clutch gearbox for...wait for it...an eight-speed automatic? What about the idea of punching power to all four wheels, rather than the back axle?

On a day's drive through the badlands bordering California's Salton Sea, it didn't take long to discover our worries were for naught. The from-the-ground-up makeover is everything one could want: easy on the eyes, but unstinting on performance. The 2019 model now makes 600 horsepower and 553 pound-feet of tire-spinning torque from its twin-turbo 4.4-liter V-8—a full 40 hp and 53 lb-ft increase over the old Beemer.

As for that new eight-speed automatic? Sure, you don't get the pleasure of rowing a manual, but it is incredibly quick and intuitive, seemingly always in the right gear. And those intent on trying to outsmart the computer control system can still tap the paddle-shifters. In fact, serious performance fans can select from five different drive modes, each ramping up the aggression factor while dialing back nanny systems like traction and electronic stability controls. And rather than hindering the fun, the all-wheel-drive system ensures all that power goes to the pavement. It also means that Snowbelt buyers can use the new M5 as their year-round daily driver.

With a starting price of \$102,700—which quickly jumps to \$120,000 the way you're likely to configure it—the 2019 BMW M5 isn't cheap. But put in perspective—a car that gets from 0 to 60 in less than 3 seconds and gives a good chase to many a supercar on the track, while still hauling five people and your groceries around town in style and comfort—it may be one of the year's big bargains.

Visit bmwusa.com/5series

—Paul A. Eisenstein

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In-Vest In Your Best

In the movie *Catch Me If You Can*, when the young imposter/con man Frank Abagnale sees *Goldfinger* and sets his sights on impersonating 007, the ejector seat and grille-mounted machine guns on Bond's Aston Martin aren't what he insists on getting just right. It's the three-piece Savile Row suit. A vest on a man goes a long way to making him look suave, confident and powerful without having to revert to gadgets. Consider also Steve McQueen in *The Thomas Crown Affair*. He's always the coolest man on the screen and in the caper, often styling with a gold chain and pocket watch.

Part of the charm of a vest—or waistcoat, if you want to put on Anglo airs—is the way it tidies up an ensemble. It can hide away billowing shirtfronts or guts that creep over the belt line. Moreover, a vest creates sight lines that frame the chest, while drawing the eye to the face. It's a good look for almost any body type. The bonus for cigar smokers is that its pockets afford accessible storage for lighters and cutters.

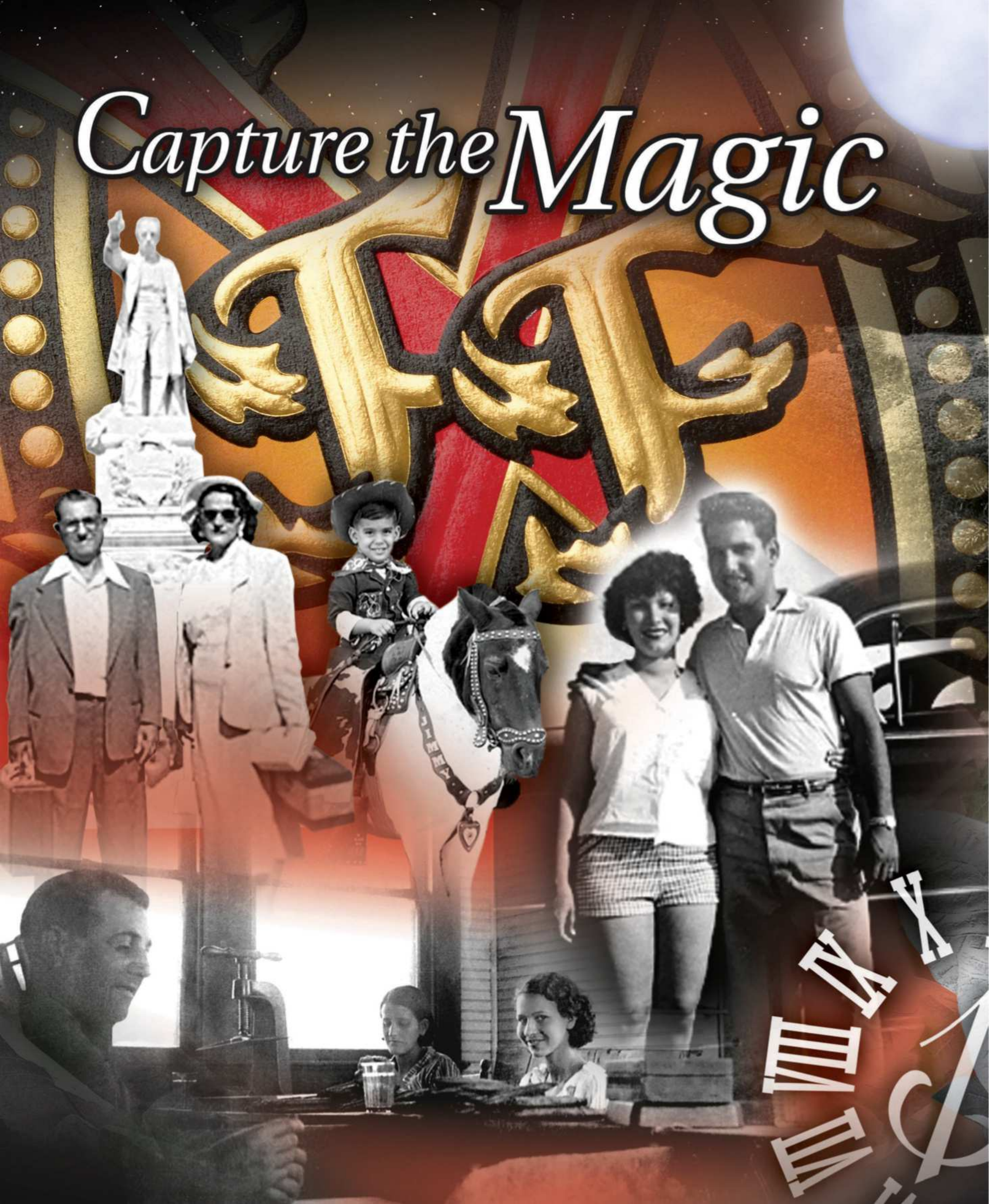
An entire three-piece suit isn't necessary for pulling off a vest. You can wear a vest that contrasts your suit coat or your jacket and slacks. Or the waistcoat can be the only coat you wear, with jeans and a shirt. Furthermore, your jacket can stay unbuttoned without looking slovenly. In fact, only a few caveats apply. Your vest should cover your belt. With the exception of the bottom button, it shouldn't be worn unbuttoned—unless you're into the Wild West sheriff look. And do not pair vests with short sleeve shirts—unless, of course, you're riding with a motorcycle gang. In which case, go with cutoff sleeves or no shirt at all. Just don't expect to ride with James Bond.

—Jack Bettridge



While pulling off the perfect heist in *The Thomas Crown Affair*, Steve McQueen kept himself neat and trim in a three-piece suit.

Capture the Magic

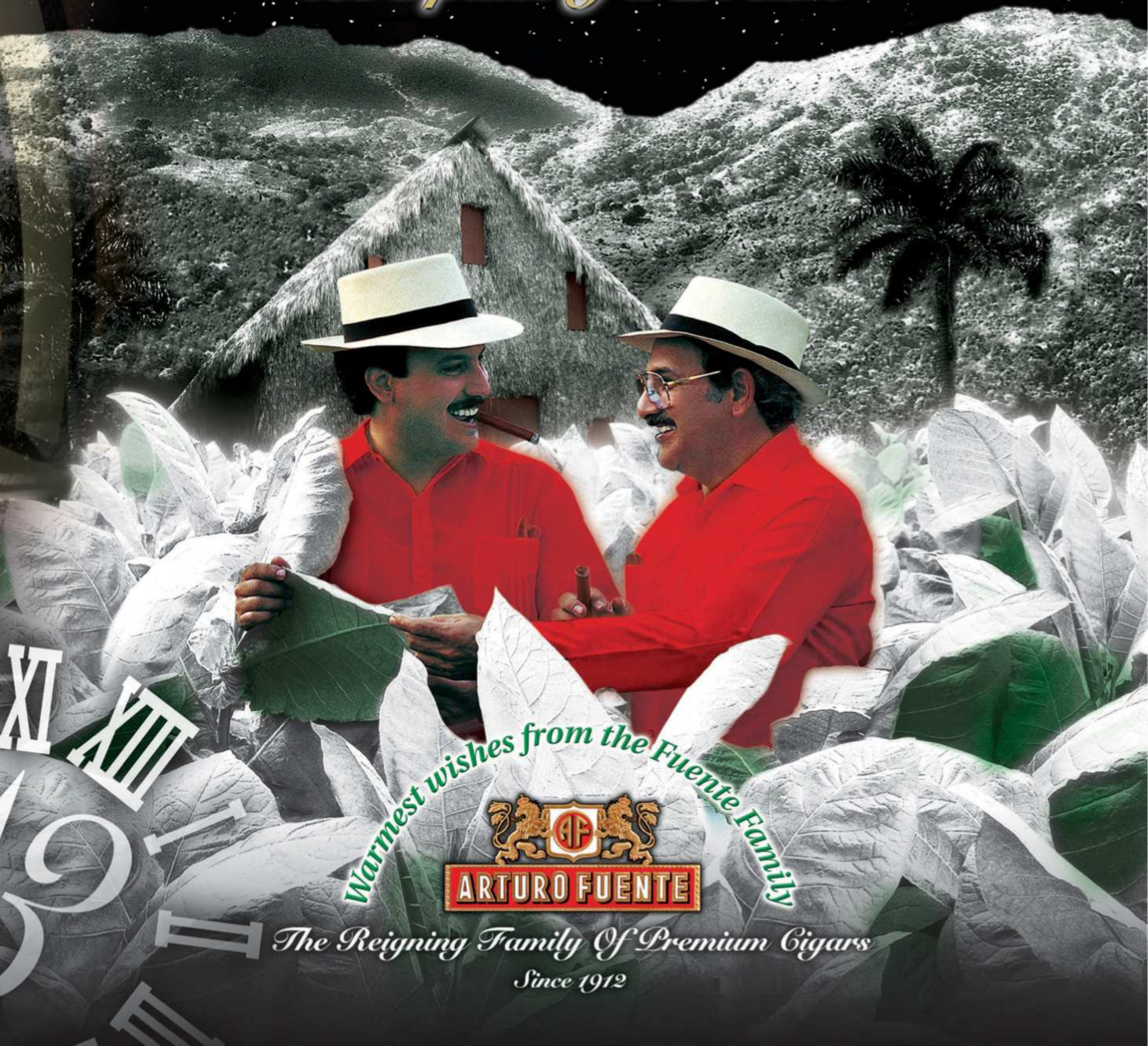


IX
VIII
VII
VI
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Since 1912



Ultrathin Watches

Only true masters of the art of watchmaking can take the craft to minimalist extremes. This year, Piaget, a specialist in ultrathin watchmaking since it introduced the 2.0-mm-thick 9P manual movement in 1957, continues to square off with Bulgari, a newcomer to the genre.

Piaget marked the 60th anniversary of its elegant Altiplano collection with the Ultimate Automatic 910P (\$27,300 in rose gold and \$28,400 in white gold), measuring only 4.3 mm thick. The automatic watch builds off the manual-winding 900P from 2014, similarly condensing space by utilizing the case as a base plate. Other tweaks were made to the movement architecture to further reduce the height of the exposed movement.

The brand further flexed its ultra-thin muscles with a concept piece, the Altiplano Ultimate Concept, which, at 2 mm, is a little thicker than a quarter. The wafer-like case is made of a stiff cobalt-based alloy, and the movement integrates the barrel into the case with a telescopic flat crown that recesses into the case band.

Audemars Piguet also unveiled a concept watch with its Royal

Oak RD#2, which, at 6.3 mm, claims the record for the thinnest automatic perpetual calendar, a format that tends to be thick even without a winding rotor. Audemars' engineers devised a fully integrated single-level solution with the patented 5133 caliber, which is expected to filter into the main collections.

Bulgari has focused its thinning sights on high complications. In 2014, the manual-winding Octo Tourbillon Finissimo set a new record for thin tourbillons with a movement measuring 1.95 mm thick in a 5-mm-thick case. Next up was a record-breaking 6.85-mm-thick minute repeater followed by a 5.1-mm-thick automatic, and this year's 3.95-mm-thick Octo Finissimo Tourbillon Automatic (price upon request), which set a new benchmark for automatic watches in general, plus adds a tourbillon for good measure. The sandblasted titanium case and skeletonized movement make a striking modern statement that tells everyone that this is not your grandfather's watch.

Visit piaget.com, audemarspiguet.com and bulgari.com

—Laurie Kahle

Some say we have a winning spirit.

This year we received a 94-point rating in the Ultimate Spirits Challenge. Here's to another 200 years of not changing a thing.



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House-Aged Champagne

Everyone knows a sandwich tastes better when someone else makes it for you. And if you want a perfectly aged bottle of vintage Champagne, you let the experts do it. That's the concept behind Champagne library releases, allocated bottlings of top vintages from a handful of producers.

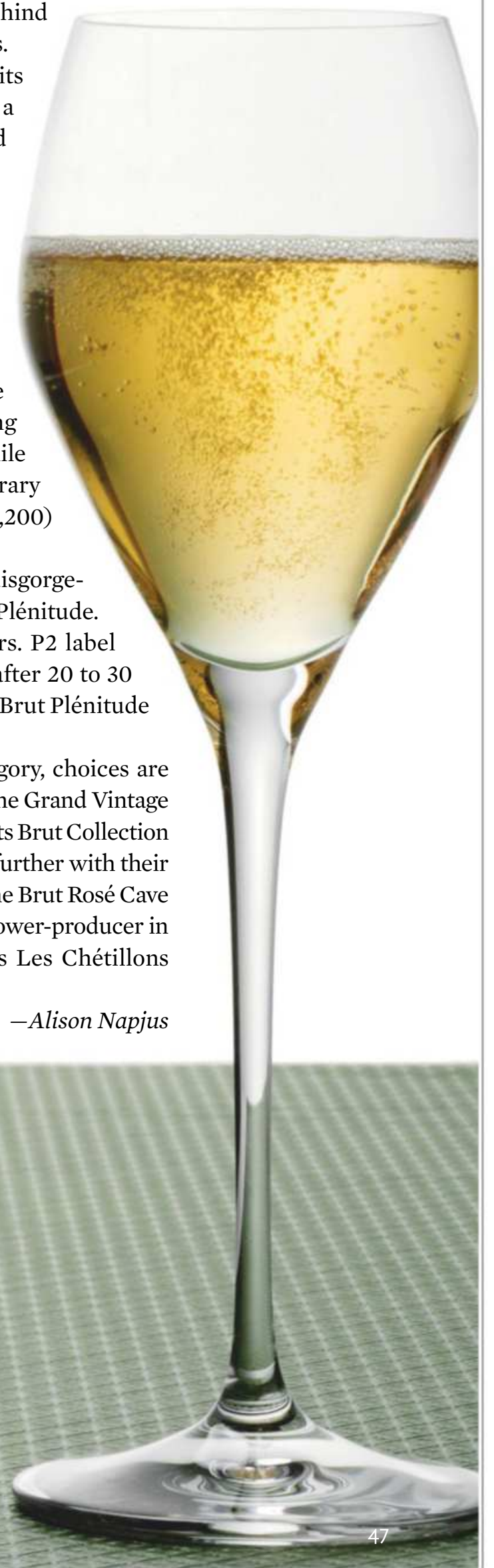
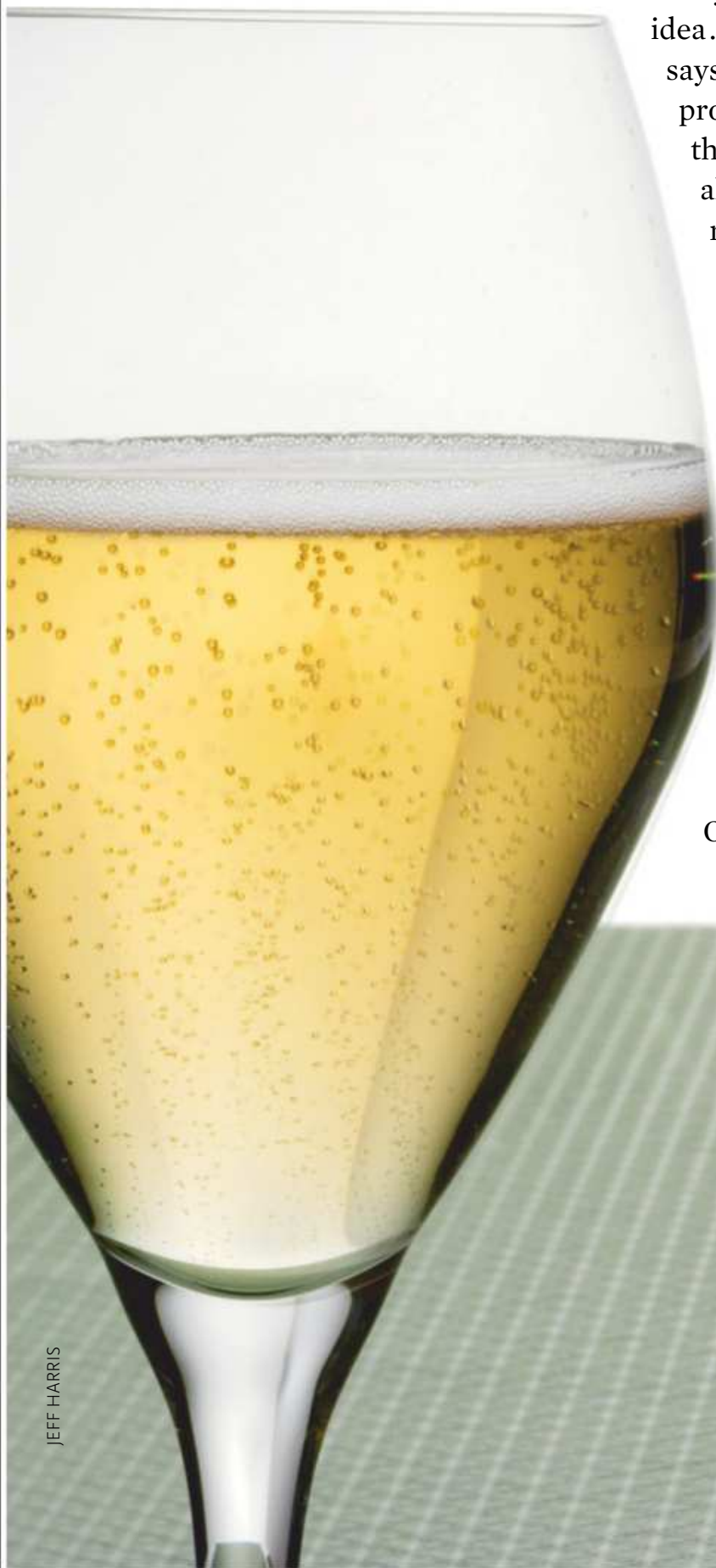
Unlike most wines, Champagne undergoes a secondary fermentation in the bottle to create its bubbles. The final production step is disgorgement in which sediment in the neck is removed (for a top vintage-dated cuvée that moment typically comes four to seven years after harvest). Standard Champagne aging—something anyone with a good wine cooler could do—is a post-disgorgement cellaring process. But real aging expertise comes before disgorgement. The *chef de cave* (head winemaker) extends maturation and contact with the enriching sediment, carefully monitoring select wines for the ideal moment to disgorge.

That may take decades, as was the case with this year's editions of Vinothèque, the Cristal library releases from Champagne Louis Roederer. "The idea... was really to show Cristal in the 20-year window," says chef de cave Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon. He feels the program "catches the best of both worlds," showcasing the concentration and richness of aged Champagne, while allowing the wine's minerality to emerge. Current library releases include the 1996 Brut Cristal Vinothèque (\$1,200) and Brut Rosé Cristal Vinothèque (\$2,400).

Dom Pérignon chose to reflect three phases of disgorgement when it relabeled its Oenothèque program as Plénitude. Initial releases are disgorged after about six years. P2 label indicates 12 to 16 years. P3 means disgorgement after 20 to 30 years. The Brut Plénitude P2 2000 (\$395) and the Brut Plénitude P3 1988 (\$1,000) are currently being offered.

While availability may be limited in the category, choices are expansive. Moët & Chandon has its Brut Champagne Grand Vintage Collection 2002 (\$140). Krug focuses on 1990 with its Brut Collection 1990 (\$600), while Veuve Clicquot goes back even further with their Brut Cave Privée 1989 (\$185), the 1982 (\$355), and the Brut Rosé Cave Privée 1979 (\$420). Pierre Péters is the lone small grower-producer in the game. Its single vineyard Brut Blanc de Blancs Les Chétillons Oenothèque 2002 (\$280) is a beautiful example.

—Alison Napjus



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Vigilant Reliance Wall Humidors

You've always wanted a bigger humidor but never had the space. Cabinet models take up too much room and end-table humidors are as bulky as a small refrigerator. The Vigilant Reliance Wall Humidor is an elegant solution. It delivers more storage with no footprint by tucking into unused space in the wall.

The four Reliance models are designed to fit between studs in your walls. As such, installation requires a bit of carpentry, but in the end you have a handcrafted unit framed in mahogany wood with a sturdy glass door and adjustable Spanish cedar shelves. They come in four sizes, each named after its approximate cigar capacity: Reliance 350 (\$2,385); 450 (\$2,385); 550 (\$2,685); and 750 (\$2,685). The units range in size from 30 inches wide by 40 7/8 inches high by 6 1/2 inches deep to 30 inches wide by 60 7/8 inches high by 8 1/2 inches deep. (The two deeper units cannot be fitted into exterior walls.)

The humidifier runs on distilled water with a removable 1 1/2 quart acrylic reservoir. It also includes a Sentry Analog system with a time-to-fill LED indicator and high and low alarms. An upgraded humidity system and low-voltage interior lights are available options.

The acrylic fronts serve to hold loose cigars in place, but may be removed to provide more space for box storage. Vigilant's Dover, New Hampshire, shop will also customize units for size and wood type (including oak, cherry, walnut, pine and maple). And for those who have the luxury of extra living space to display even more cigar furniture, the company also makes a range of freestanding cabinets, lockers and armoires, as well as wine-storing facilities.

Visit vigilantinc.com

—David Clough





Ring of Fire

There's a tribal pull to a firepit: Friends gather, conversation flows, the smoke of your cigar blends with the cinders. It's magnetic, like the kitchen in your home. So why would you put a Sub Zero and a Wolf stove inside and not build anything but an investment grade centerpiece for the backyard?

"This is something you'll pass down to your children," says Mike Bertelsen, the creator of the Cowboy Cauldron, a suspended firepit that—like the Big Green Egg and other "heirloom grade" hard goods—has inspired devotion. "It suits your most primal instinct. Around a circle, face to face, not looking at it like a screen."

Bertelsen, a D.C. lobbyist, says the Cauldron idea sprung from a visit to George Washington's Mount Vernon. "They had a couple of braziers hanging to keep the onlookers warm, and it just clicked for me. I had a guy make one out of steel and next thing you know I had people opening up about their personal lives, which is a rare thing in Washington, D.C."

The Cauldron lifestyle soon spread among seemingly unconnected customers. The Prince of Qatar has nine of them. Meadowood Restaurant in Napa, the Four Seasons,

Mayacamas Vineyards and Blue Smoke all have one (or more). With names like the Urban Cowboy, the Wrangler and the Ranch Boss, they range in price from \$1,695 to \$2,995.

Today, the units are stamped out of American steel by a ball-field-sized press in Ohio. Functionally, the alloy is formulated to stretch into the half-sphere structure, which allows it to radiate evenly to your legs and feet while concentrating the heat inside the grill. The Cauldron can also be a cooking surface with the addition of a grate, made in Indiana.

But the Cauldron would be a failure if it were only a cook top or social catalyst. It works because it's a damn good pit to stand around. "The warmth is closer to your core, while the smoke is already accelerating past your head as it rises," says Bertelsen. "It's beautiful, functional, practical."

Just about the only thing wrong with the Cauldron? Getting one. "We don't have trouble selling cauldrons, we have trouble making them," says Bertelsen.

Visit cowboycauldron.com

—Matt Bean

WELCOME TO WHISKY'S BEST KEPT SECRET

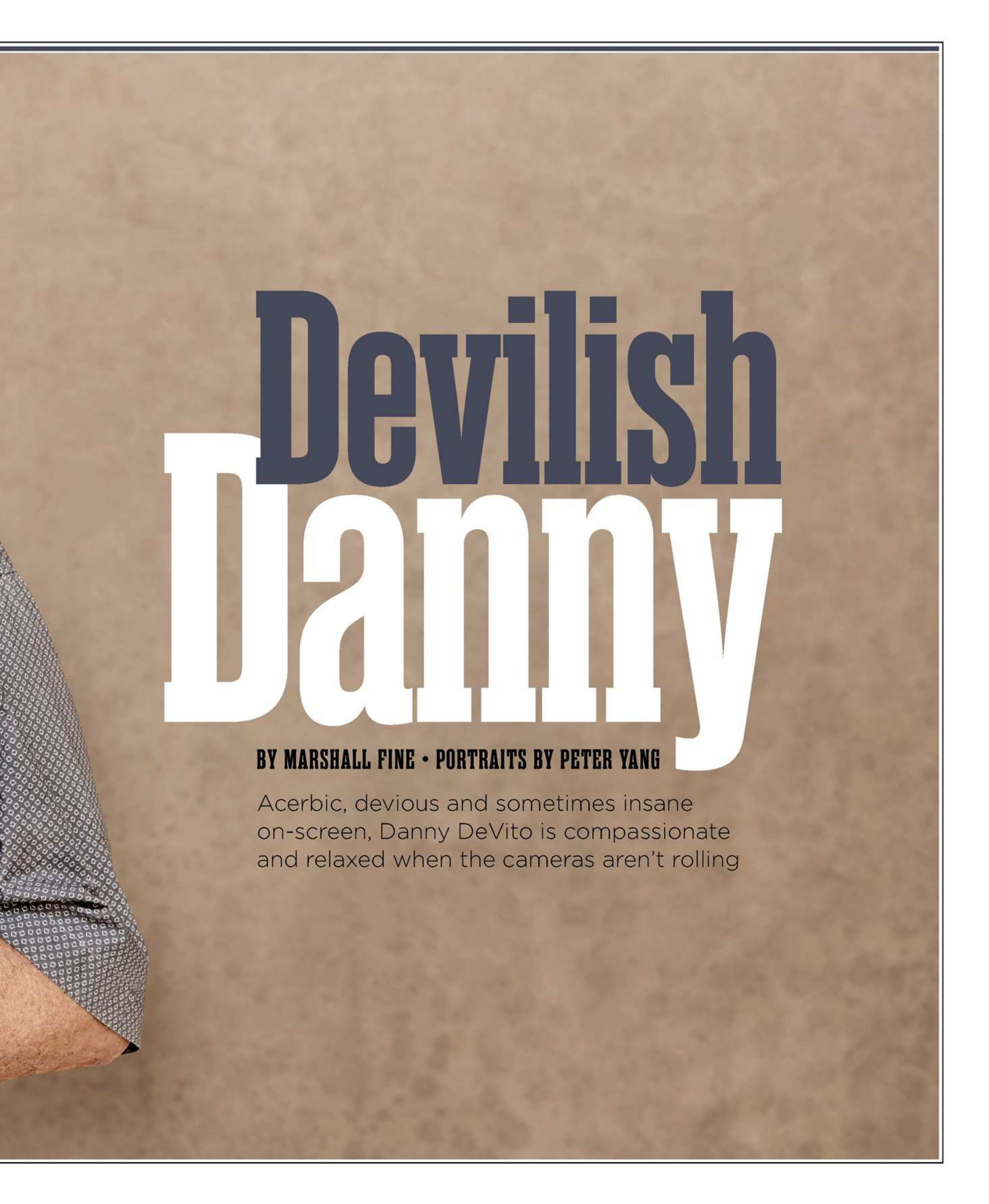


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Please Drink Responsibly.

MORTLACH 12 Year Old Single Malt Scotch Whisky. 43.4% Alc/Vol. Imported by Diageo, Norwalk, CT.

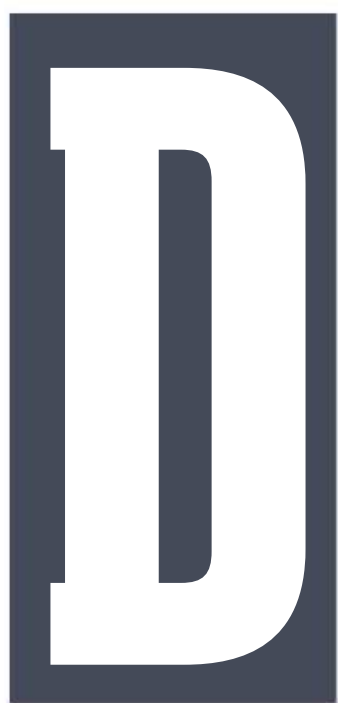




Devilish Danny

BY MARSHALL FINE • PORTRAITS BY PETER YANG

Acerbic, devious and sometimes insane on-screen, Danny DeVito is compassionate and relaxed when the cameras aren't rolling



DANNY DEVITO can visualize it perfectly, as though through a director's viewfinder: A large tobacco field in Cuba. A carpet of green fills the frame, as viewed from overhead by that latest tool in the cinematographer's bag of tricks, a drone camera. And in the middle of this emerald vision stands...Danny DeVito, a triumphant smile on his face, enjoying his favorite cigar, a Partagás Serie D No. 4.

"Imagine that cover," DeVito says of his imaginary shoot for this story. He adds with a conspiratorial smile, "We should have gone to Cuba for this interview."

It's probably redundant to call DeVito's smile conspiratorial. Subversive and devious have been his default comic modes from the time he claimed his place in American popular culture playing acerbic dispatcher Louie De Palma in the classic sitcom "Taxi," which originally aired in 1978. They've remained his stock-in-trade for decades, right up through today, portraying the impossibly venal (and possibly deranged) Frank Reynolds on the wild FX comedy "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia," which kicked off its 13th unruly season in September, and will return for season 14 next year.

On film or TV, DeVito's rubbery, uninhibited mug and fire-cracker physicality create a cartoonish energy that recalls characters from the golden age of *Looney Tunes*. Comparisons to Yosemite Sam and the Tasmanian Devil regularly dot the reviews of his performances in films like *Ruthless People*, *Twins* and *Romancing the Stone*. In person, however, DeVito is happier, warmer and a lot more chilled-out than the average character he plays—not that he can't put on gruff comic bluster at a moment's notice.

He may not be in Cuba, but he seems pretty content, enjoying lunch in an expansive private room at the Century City, California, branch of Craft, part of the growing restaurant group owned by chef Tom Colicchio. DeVito looks amused when he enters to find a dining table set for two, the only furnishings in a space the size of a corporate boardroom. He is working his way through lunch—a plate of wild arugula with parmesan and pine nuts and another with baby beets, Point Reyes Bay Blue cheese and tarragon—when the server, whose name is Cassandra, enters to ask, "How are you doing?"

"Why do you care?" DeVito snaps, then laughs along with Cassandra, who is giggling with surprise.

He solicits her opinion of his choice of greens. "There's something about arugula," he says. "I put it on everything. I like anchovies on a margherita pizza, well-done. Then I throw arugula on top and fold it up. It's like heaven." His smile disappears when Cassandra inquires whether he'll be following his vegetarian choices with something sweeter. "You know I can't eat dessert," he says, his voice a mixture of shame and accusation. Then the malice quickly dissolves into another hearty DeVito chuckle.

It has been 22 years since Danny DeVito graced the cover of *CIGAR AFICIONADO*. At that point in 1996, he was an Emmy- and Golden Globe-winning actor on a roll. He'd made the transition from TV acclaim to big-screen stardom, then trumped that by moving behind the camera, both as a producer and as a director.

Today, the man is an institution: a respected filmmaker and beloved comedy actor with strong dramatic chops and a career as prolific as a contract player under the old studio system. DeVito is still guaranteed to give a canny, balls-out comic performance in anything he takes on, even as he happily explores the numerous opportunities that come his way.

DeVito, who turned 74 in November, is ready for whatever comes next. As "It's Always Sunny" has proved, there's almost nothing he won't do for the sake of a bit, even if that means emerging naked and sweaty from inside a couch in the middle of an office Christmas party. (Google "Frank in the Couch" and feast your eyes on a side of DeVito that almost 90,000 YouTube viewers—not to mention the million or so who watch the show in real time or rerun—can't erase from their memories.)

Longtime pal Michael Douglas, who has collaborated with DeVito several times, recently teamed up with him again when DeVito filmed a guest spot on "The Kominsky Method," a series Douglas is doing for Netflix. "He loves taking chances," Douglas says. "He's got a great energy level and imagination. He really has the ability to fly without a net."

"I've told the writers nothing is off-limits for me," DeVito says of "Sunny." "That show is a lot of fun. The season we just finished was a whirlwind time, a three-month shoot. I've been with those guys for, like 15 years. [He joined the show for its second season, which aired in 2006.] Working at FX has been easy as pie. They leave the creators alone."

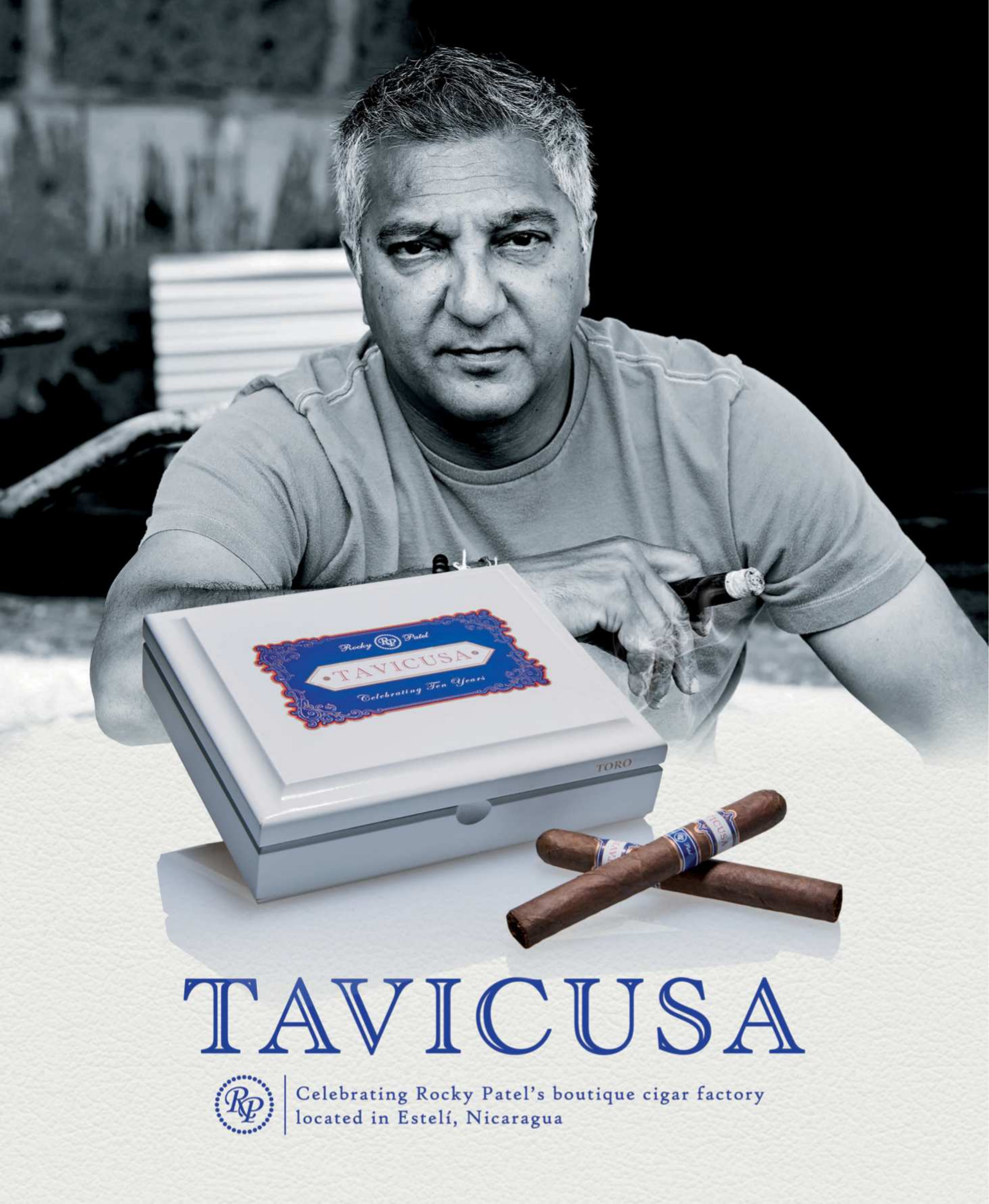
Talking over a two-plus-hour lunch at Craft, DeVito is refreshed after taking some time off after the show wrapped: "I got to go to Sicily," he says. "I went two-and-a-half hours up into the mountains, to a town called Polizzi Generosa. It's a little mountain town. And my good friend, Vincent Schiavelli, an actor, it's his grandpop's town. Vinnie died in 2005 and he's buried there. So I went up to see him."

Which is where being Danny DeVito comes in handy.

"By the time we got up there, though, the cemetery was closed. I thought, OK, that's that and was going to have a sandwich in town with the guy who was driving me. As we're walking in the street, a car stopped—and the people recognized me and stopped me. They didn't speak much English, but we took a picture and, with my meager Italian, they asked me, 'Why are you here?' And I told them I was there to visit my friend Vincent—and they lit up. They called the mayor, who sent someone to open the cemetery for us. So, yeah, sometimes it's good to be recognized."

Dressed in a gray long-sleeve shirt and black cotton drawstring pants, his white hair still darkened by remnants of the coloring he uses to play Frank Reynolds, DeVito remains one of the most distinctive physical presences in film. That singular talent is





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BATMAN RETURNS



TAXI



ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST



THROW MOMMA FROM THE TRAIN

packed into a fireplug frame whose height Wikipedia and IMDB both list as 4-foot-10, but which at least a handful of online sources claim as 5 feet.

"Five feet?" hoots actress Kathleen Turner, a long-time friend. "Who are they kidding?"

With his almost-neckless, high-waisted physique, bald pate and large horned-rim glasses, DeVito could play a live-action Minion, one of the capsule-shaped yellow characters from the *Despicable Me* animated series. He's already played the candy version: a talking M&M magically transformed into its human equivalent. "Yeah, my 'Sunny' fans dug that," he says of the commercial, which debuted during Super Bowl LII.

"Working with him was so much fun. He's one of those guys who doesn't take life too seriously," says Tony- and Emmy-award-winning actress Kristin Chenoweth, who played his wife in *Deck the Halls* and worked with both DeVito's wife, actress Rhea Perlman of "Cheers" fame, and his daughter Lucy off-Broadway.

"He doesn't get too worked up about things. I can get my panties in a bunch so quickly, but not him. It was a good lesson to learn."

If DeVito is able to follow his bliss in his 60s and 70s, it's only after years of single-minded hard work. "He's always been a restless cat," Douglas says. "His head was always going. He was always pursuing, looking for more, never settling. He was always a very creative guy."

DeVito's first break came when he landed a role in an off-Broadway production of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* that led to his playing the same role, Mr. Martini, in the Oscar-winning 1975 film, produced by Douglas. That film's star, Jack Nicholson, cast DeVito in his own film, *Goin' South*, even as DeVito parlayed guest-starring stints on TV shows like "Police Woman" into his role on "Taxi," which launched DeVito in 1978.

Besides making him a star, "Taxi" made a cigar lover out of DeVito. The mostly male cast "would celebrate every holiday with a box of Cubans—and don't ask where we got them," DeVito



FULL-FLAVORED ULTRA SMOOTH EXTRA-SATISFACTION

Made with only Jalapa Ligeros from Nicaragua's northern most tobacco region, the Cain Daytona delivers a solid, but smooth, medium-bodied taste.

Cain
DAYTONA 

recalls. “Then it became holidays and birthdays.” Today, DeVito keeps humidors in New York and Los Angeles, reminiscing about one of his early ones: “My agent gave me a big beautiful one during ‘Taxi’—you needed someone to come in and service it, like a Rolls-Royce. The ones I have now I take care of myself.”

His favorite time to enjoy a cigar is after a really good dinner. In his 1996 CIGAR AFICIONADO cover story, he told a story about a memorable meal in first class on a Lufthansa flight to Berlin in the late 1980s. When he asked if he could end the meal by lighting a stogie, DeVito was told by the flight attendant that, while it was against the rules, she would allow him to do so, under the condition that everyone else on the plane agreed. DeVito then asked every other passenger; on the verge of a unanimous verdict, he approached one final first-class resident, who told him, “Danny, I’m not going to let you smoke that cigar—unless you give me one, too.”

Luckily, says DeVito, chuckling as he recalls the incident, “I had another one with me.”

That was a social smoke, but today he typically smokes his cigars while solo. “Right now, I usually smoke alone, after dinner,” he says. “I find a nice



**“Danny does nastiness like nobody else.
He relishes his nastiness.”**

—MICHAEL DOUGLAS

spot and fire up. The other night at the beach, I sat out and looked at the crescent moon and had a nice smoke. There’s something very calming about that feeling. I’ve been through a lot of phases, but it’s always been Cubans for me. There’s just something about them. I’ve always wanted to go to Cuba and watch them make them.”

DeVito was mentored in his appreciation of fine tobacco by TV legend Ed. Weinberger, one of the creators of “Taxi,” “The Mary Tyler Moore Show” and numerous others.

“Ed. Weinberger was pretty serious about the whole cigar-smoking thing. We had a lot of discussions about that. One of the things we used to discuss was: Do you take the band off or leave it on? Are you taking it off because you don’t want to seem to be showing off? Or because you don’t want people to know how much the cigar cost?” DeVito says. “It’s kind of easy for me to understand taking the band off so you’re not broadcasting what kind of cigar you’re smoking. Even when I used to go on the subway, reading a book, I always made a book cover out of a grocery bag. I didn’t want people to know what I was reading. That was nobody’s business. I have a very possessive thing about what I do.” He pauses and smiles at the irony: “Even though I’m an actor sitting here talking my ass off.”

With a professional career closing in on a half-century, DeVito is far more than a star—he is a comedy icon, whose very presence in a movie ensures at least a couple of sure-fire laughs. Credit 1984’s *Romancing the Stone* as the film that translated DeVito’s wolverine-like comic instincts to the big screen, with a role that showed just what DeVito could do when it came to finding the lighter side of darker impulses.

“When I started producing *Romancing the Stone*, it was a romantic adventure,” Douglas says. “Danny is fully responsible for making it a romantic-comedy-adventure—which made it a success. That character that he brought was all him—and I was so grateful at how much he added. Danny does nastiness like nobody else; he relishes his nastiness. He enjoys busting balls in character.”

Born November 17, 1944 in Neptune Township, New Jersey, DeVito’s early years were spent in nearby Asbury Park, where, as an adolescent, he saw friends succumbing to the heroin that was invading his neighborhood, and asked his parents to send him to private school to get away from bad influences. After high school,

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• FOR EXTRA •
SMOOTHNESS



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WE AGE



WE BLEND



WE AGE AGAIN

Dewar's.

What's in a name? In a word, standards. At Dewar's, we've made quite a name for ourselves by living true to our standards for over 130 years. That's about how long we have been double aging our whisky.

Why? For extra smoothness.

It takes longer and costs more but aging, blending and aging again is the gold standard when it comes to marrying forty different single malts and grains into one super smooth Dewar's.

LIVE TRUE



he enrolled in night classes at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts to learn makeup techniques to use working in his sister's New Jersey beauty salon. Instead, he fell hard for acting and began taking classes, then started to earn credits on stage while rooming with Douglas.

The two met in the summer of 1967, when both were working at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center in New London, Connecticut. "I was on the beach, looking out at the Long Island Sound and this guy walks up to me, with this long head of hair, if you can imagine," Douglas recalls. "He says, 'You get high?' We were both 1967 potheads, so we smoked a joint and that was a beginning of a long, long friendship."

After a lauded and varied career, DeVito is that rarity: a true cross-generational star. His earliest fans, the baby-boom audience that watched "Taxi" and his films of the 1980s and 1990s, still cheer him. Children giggle at him as a slapstick M&M; their parents chuckle at the meta humor of his playing the comic brute transformed by smoothie George Clooney in a recent commercial for Nespresso. Meanwhile, a millennial audience discovers DeVito's uninhibited, id-fueled wit anew on "Sunny," their springboard to his voluminous filmography.

"I always loved his willingness to throw himself into things," says Kathleen Turner, with whom DeVito teamed on three films with Michael Douglas. "It made him fun to work with. He knew what he wanted and it was great fun to ride along."

DeVito brushes off the idea of his own appeal, pointing instead to the characters he's played and the films themselves:

"This new generation of fans has to do with the TV show," he says. "There are people who loved the movies I was fortunate enough to do." He rattles off roles: Louie De Palma from "Taxi," Sam Stone from *Ruthless People*, playing the villain The Penguin in one of the *Batman* films. "Hey, those are great parts," he says. "I've been lucky that way."

For all of the conniving, mean-spirited comic villains he's so memorably played, DeVito also has a lengthy résumé as a serious actor, capable of vulnerable, soulful performances. Check him out as a struggling single dad in 1993's *Jack the Bear*, as a broken-hearted janitor tentatively romancing a fragile Holly Hunter in 1998's *Living Out Loud* or as an elderly man finally ready to commit to marriage to his longtime partner in his own 2016 short film, *Curmudgeons*.

"He is a true actor at the highest level," Chenoweth says. "Like the best comedians, he can play tragedy and, the next second, have you laughing."

Look a little deeper at DeVito's résumé and you'll find that he's worked with many of the major directors of his era, from Francis Ford Coppola to Woody Allen, David Mamet to James L. Brooks, Brian De Palma, Milos Forman and Robert Zemeckis.

DeVito went back to the stage in 2012, his first time in 40 years, when British director Thea Sharrock sought him out to play Willie Clark, a bitter, aging, ex-vaudeville performer, in a West End production of Neil Simon's *The Sunshine Boys*, opposite British actor Richard Griffiths. The role proved magical for DeVito, earning him raves from the London critics. Griffiths'



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untimely death in 2013 ended the plan to transfer the production to New York, though DeVito brought the show to Los Angeles for a brief run, with “Taxi”-mate Judd Hirsch in Griffiths’ role.

“London was a leap of faith I made with these two people, Thea and Richard, who had such strong backgrounds in theater,” DeVito says. “Going there and working with them, I felt like I was nestled in Willie Mays’ glove.”

DeVito made it to Broadway in 2017, in a revival of Arthur Miller’s *The Price*. His Broadway debut earned him a Drama Desk Award and a Tony nomination, both as actor in a featured role.

DeVito started directing with a few “Taxi” episodes, then moved into film, with a résumé that includes *Throw Momma From the Train*, *Hoffa* and *War of the Roses*. As a producer, he’s been more prolific; his Jersey Films production company was responsible for a list of Oscar nominees and winners that includes *Pulp Fiction*, *Erin Brockovich*, *Garden State*, *Reality Bites*, *Gattaca*, *Out of Sight* and DeVito’s own films.

“I had the ability to embrace young filmmakers and that’s

what I did,” DeVito says. “I felt I was somebody who could protect their integrity, to support them and keep others from tampering with their ideas or vision. They turned *Pulp Fiction* down at TriStar because it was ‘too dark.’ Meanwhile, their big film of the moment was *Cliffhanger*, with people hanging off of cliffs. I remember we had 20 walkouts at the first screening of *Pulp Fiction*. But my deal with Quentin was that I would give him anything he needed and Harvey [Weinstein, then cohead of Miramax Films] had to go along. Harvey went nuts when Quentin wanted to cast John Travolta, instead of Daniel Day-Lewis. But Quentin was right. If someone handed me a 155-page script today by a basically unknown person who had the spirit and commitment that Quentin Tarantino had, I’d get that movie made.”

At this point, DeVito is a guy with a deep appreciation for how long, varied and expansive his career has been. It comes through in his relationship with his friends, who speak of DeVito’s thoughtfulness and loyalty.

“When I got sick with rheumatoid arthritis, he was one of the



the flight attendant for a deck of cards: “It turned out he was a great cardsharp, a great card manipulator, and knew every trick in the book. So we spent five hours watching him do card tricks and telling stories about show business.”

DeVito’s three kids—Lucy, 35; Gracie, 33; and Jake, 31—are grown and launched. His relationship with Emmy-winning actress Perlman (they married in 1982, having moved in together two weeks after meeting in 1971) has weathered storms since 2012. Various announcements of separation and reconciliation have been issued, without the couple ever actually proceeding to divorce.

“We’re separated but we’re very good friends,” DeVito says. “We’ve been together 50 years. We still have deep feelings and these three wonderful kids. And we always will.”

So what’s the secret to marital longevity? “A big house,” DeVito jokes.

DeVito’s take-it-as-it-comes approach has its roots in his parents’ attitudes. “When I was a kid, I always learned the lesson that things are just things. Your bike gets stolen? Well, that’s tough, but it ain’t the end of the world.” He tells a story about taking a brief vacation with Perlman in Key

“Things are just things. Your bike gets stolen? Well, that’s tough, but it ain’t the end of the world.”

West after their oldest daughter was born. At one point, Perlman realized she’d lost her wedding ring, which had been given to her by DeVito’s mother, who told her it was her own mother’s ring. The couple frantically, fruitlessly searched their hotel room, until they gave up. They called DeVito’s mother to confess the loss. “Eh,” she said, “it’s a piece of jewelry.”

The comment made its mark. “Really, it’s stuff. It’s just stuff. You’re gonna get crazy about things?”

And so Danny DeVito, at once intrepid and sanguine, faces the future, by not thinking about it very much at all. It’s more entertaining that way.

“I hope I live as long as I can and have fun while doing it,” he says. “You’ve got to look at the bright side. I don’t have projects in my mind or thoughts about what I want to do once I leave this table. I’ve visited a lot of places and I’d like to see more. I don’t know what will happen. I just look forward to the next step.” ❖

Contributing editor Marshall Fine is critic-in-residence at The Picture House Regional Film Center in Pelham, NY.

first to call and tell me, ‘Whatever you need,’” Turner says. Adds Douglas, “He’s a good friend because he’s a good listener and he’s compassionate. He has the ability to feel what others feel—and he’s funny.”

DeVito has a sharp memory for the kind of encounters that bowled him over early in his career, when he—an emissary from a new generation—found himself rubbing shoulders with performers who had entranced him as a kid. There was the time he was backstage at his first Emmy Awards, and came face to face with Lucille Ball: “I mean, it’s Lucy!” he says. “She was so meaningful to me. What do you say?” He recounts an unexpected encounter with James Stewart, and a cross-country plane trip on the defunct luxury airline MGM Grand, when DeVito and his nephew shared a private compartment with comedian Milton Berle, who asked

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Dreams

IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

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Saga Restaurant & Cigar Club



Casa de Campo Resort



Il Pasticcio Cucina Italiana



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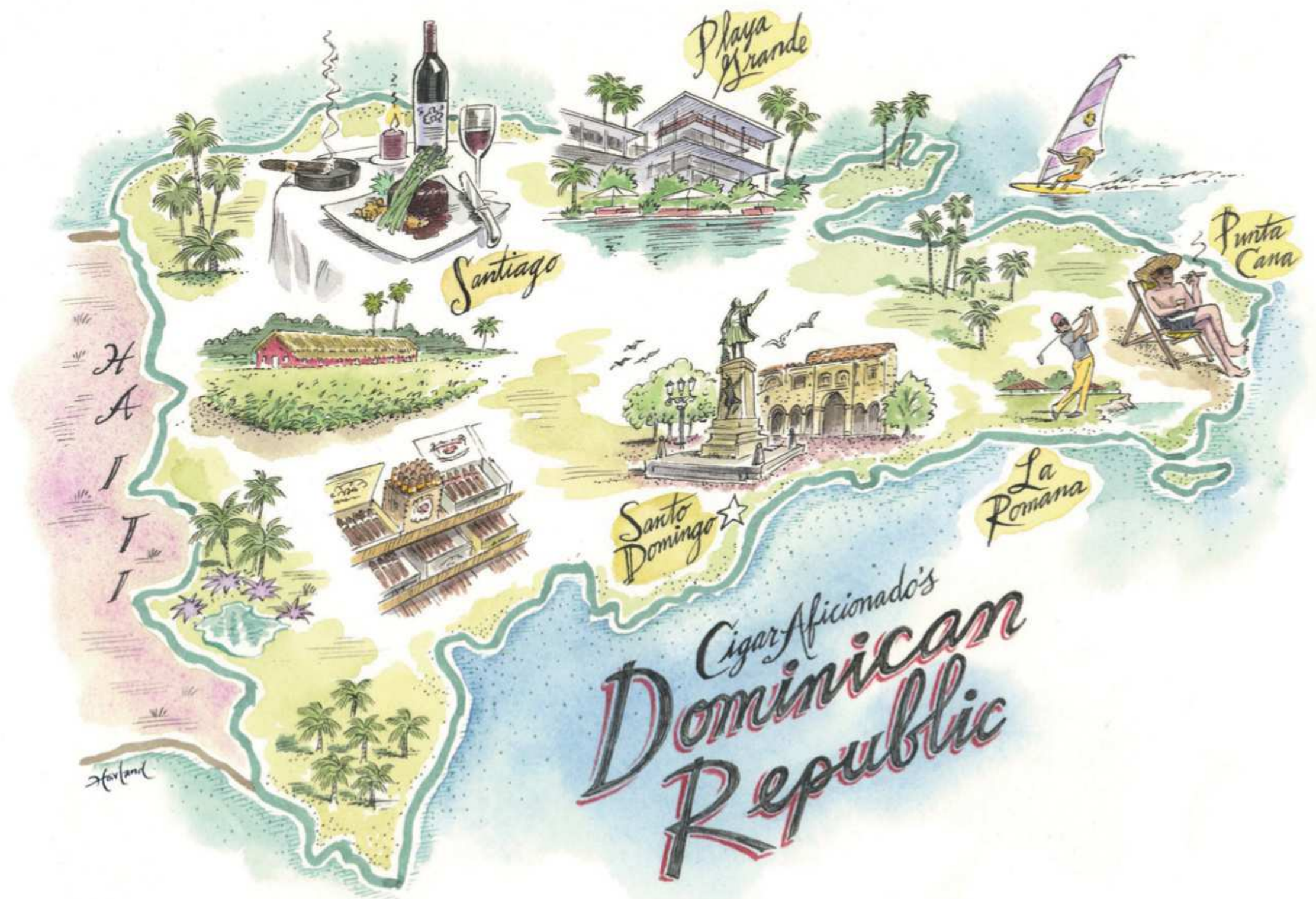


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The inherent beauty of the Dominican Republic makes itself known to the first-time traveler from the sky. As the plane begins a slow bank in the thick, tropical air, grand stretches of green fill the land below. Tobacco fields and plaintain farms, mountains and lush valleys. The world teems with life.

This is a land where tourists have plenty to keep them busy, from white-sand beaches and blue waters to world-class golf. One can walk through history on cobblestone streets, sit down to a flavorful meal of local cuisine or simply relax in style.

And this is also a country of cigars. They have been rolled here since 1903. Over the past two decades, more cigars have been made by hand in the Dominican

Republic than any other place on earth. As it's a land where fine tobacco is grown and cigars are artfully rolled, the editors of CIGAR AFICIONADO have been traveling to the Dominican Republic for more than 26 years. We've walked the nation's tobacco fields and visited its myriad cigar factories, dined with cigarmakers and smoked endless numbers of their cigars. Because we know it well and have come to love our frequent trips to this country, today we are sharing our favorite places to visit with you. The following package is, by far, the most complete guide to enjoying the country we have ever published.

If you've never been to the D.R., we hope this guide entices you to visit. And if you've been before, our stories will likely show you new places, foods and experiences to try the next time you go. Bon voyage.

SANTIAGO

Cigar City

Santiago, home to some of the world's greatest cigarmakers, is a thriving metropolis with a superb lineup of cigar-friendly dining

BY DAVID SAVONA AND GREGORY MOTTOLA

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER GARRITANO

The lights of Santiago are like a carpet of stars on display for diners at Camp David Ranch.







The waiter pours your coffee, strong and hot. As you take that first, bracing sip, you stare out from your perch and look down upon the verdant green carpet stretched out far beneath you, the lush Cibao Valley of Santiago, Dominican Republic. Puffs of morning mist blanket the hills below, rising slowly, and you light your first cigar of the day.

The view from the wraparound balcony at the Camp David Ranch, a hotel and restaurant perched high above the city of Santiago, is breathtaking in the morning, and nearly as beautiful at night. From up here one can look down upon nearly the entire city, where most Dominican cigars are rolled. The small homes and buildings far below that dot the landscape—bright and green, small plots of farmland between houses and offices—seem to go on forever. It's the second-largest city in the Dominican Republic.

It's a city built on cigars. Arturo Fuente, La Flor Dominicana, Ashton, Macanudo, E.P. Carrillo, Aging Room, Davidoff, La Aurora, Quesada and so many other brands are rolled here. Much of the tobacco that goes inside of them (as well as cigars made in Nicaragua, Honduras and elsewhere) are grown in the fertile fields nearby. But Santiago didn't always look this way. Thirty years ago, it was far smaller, more sleepy. As the demand for handmade cigars began to boom in the early-1990s, so did Santiago. The city grew, cigarmakers expanded their operations, and the owners and workers prospered. The hotels and restaurants in the city grew as well, and the airport was expanded, allowing easy access from many major cities in the United States.

Where once there were only Spartan hotel lodgings and few choices to dine, today there are comfortable places to lay your head and an ever-growing collection of restaurants for superb dining, as well as plenty of places to light up.

RECOMMENDED HOTELS

Camp David Ranch

Secluded, small and picturesque, Camp David has become our preferred spot for staying in Santiago. Getting there the first time is an eye-opening experience. It's built at the top of a 2,000-foot peak (some call it a hill, but miniature mountain might be a more apt description) and at times the car taking you there might struggle with the incline. But once you arrive you are treated to relaxation and a particularly cigar-friendly atmosphere.

There are 18 rooms at Camp David, and 14 of them have small balconies for you to enjoy a smoke, but the ideal spot is on the porch that surrounds the restaurant. Part of it is smoker friendly, and it offers views that cannot be beat. You'll look down from high above, basking in the reward of that long drive up. The food here is good, particularly at breakfast, and grilled meats or perhaps a platter of *jamón* sate your appetite in the evening. We often end a day seated outside, smoking a cigar.

The rooms were once quite rustic, but a recent renovation has made them far nicer. Renovation on that long road taking you to the hotel has also made the drive easier.

This is no five-star resort, and it lacks a pool, but Camp David is relaxing. Rooms begin at about \$50 per night in season.

Carretera Gregorio Luperón, (809) 276-6400

Hodelpa Gran Almirante

The largest and most popular hotel in Santiago, the Gran Almirante is a five-story tall hotel with 154 rooms and a casino. Back when the Dominican cigar industry was in its pre-cigar boom stage, the hotel was small, but as the cigar industry surged, the Almirante expanded. Today, it's large and comfortable, with a beautiful pool.

One sad side effect of the expansion is that the hotel no longer fully caters to the cigar smoker. The lobby, once the preferred place to puff, is no longer cigar friendly, and for a time there was no spot to smoke except for the pool. (For a short time, the hotel

DR TRAVEL TIP



Morning Coffee

When your server brings you coffee at breakfast, he or she will be holding two pots. One contains warm milk (*leche*), and the preferred way of drinking your morning brew in the DR is to have it with a considerable amount of milk. Try it.

tried to put smokers at a table inside the parking garage, if you can believe it.) A few years ago, the Almirante created a small but workable cigar smoking area just off the lobby, in the open air. The hotel also has a cigar shop with a very good selection.

Meals in the hotel are decent, especially for breakfast or a quick bite, but for dinner you can do much better elsewhere in Santiago. Its central location on an extremely busy street makes it easy to get to just about everything in the area, including the airport. The rooms here are clean and modern, although they can be loud, especially in the vicinity of the casino or the pool. And they



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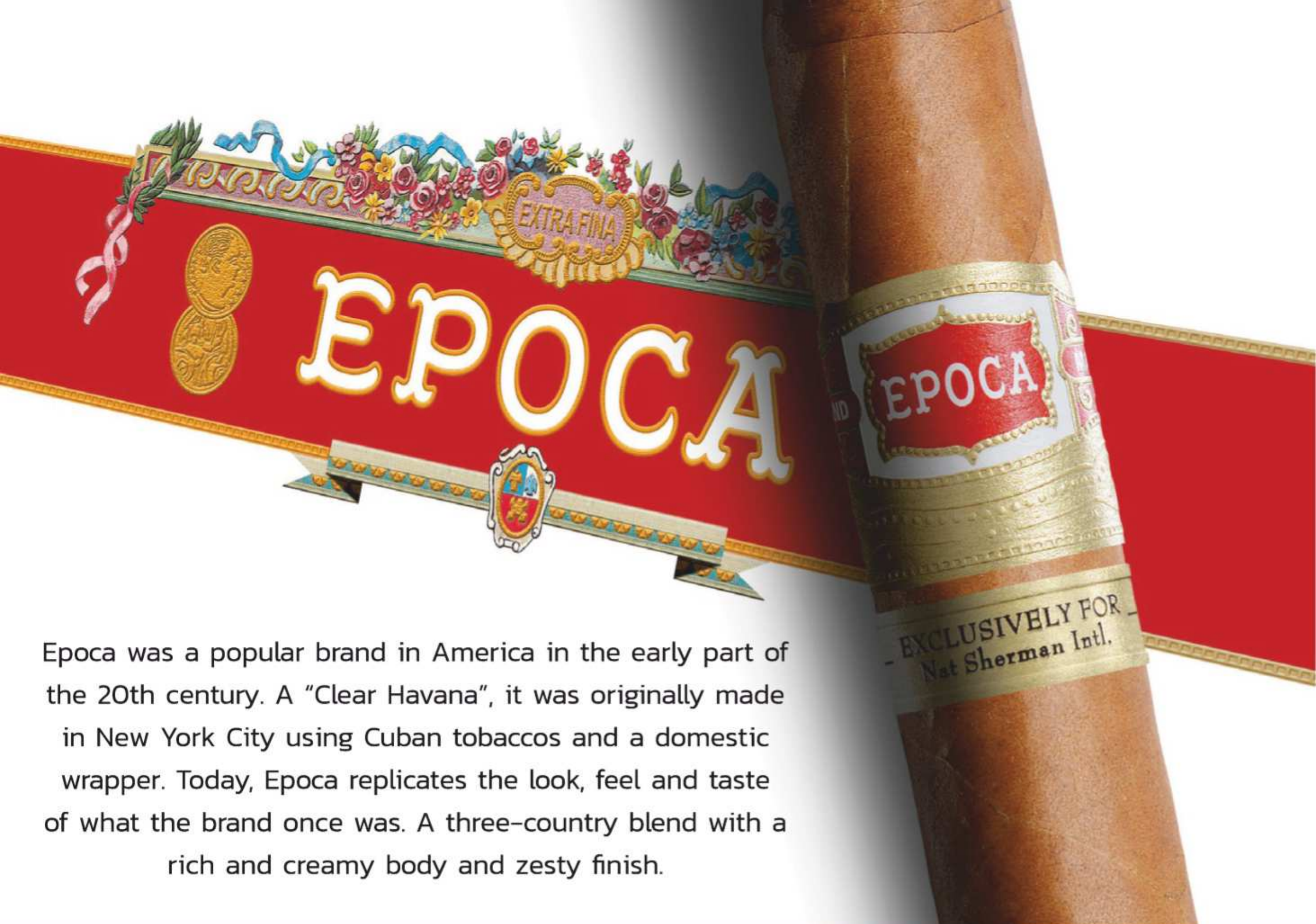
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are especially good on the executive floor, known as Club Imperial, which features its own check-in area, a private restaurant and much better room amenities, including Egyptian cotton linens and quite a comfortable bed. Rooms in season begin at \$170.

Av. Salvador Estrella Sadhalá Santiago, (809) 580-1992

CIGAR TOURISM

La Aurora Cigar World

The oldest cigar factory in the Dominican Republic has proudly put its entire operation on permanent display. A visit to La Aurora S.A., which has been making cigars since 1903, will give you a fascinating lesson in its long family history to enhance your appreciation for Dominican cigars.

Company owner Guillermo León's vision was to create a cigar experience that goes beyond a mere stroll through the factory floor. A highlight is the tobacco museum, an elaborate exhibit designed to detail the art and craft of cigar production as well as the cultivation of tobacco. There's a great sense of history and romance to every part of the exhibit, which is full of industry props and interesting displays, and even makes full use of live plants and real tobacco, adding a bit of fun to an otherwise academic presentation. The tour ends in the factory store, which sells the entire range of La Aurora cigars, plus rum and coffee.

Ctra. Santiago-Tamboril, Km 5, (809) 734-2563

ProCigar Festival

If you've never smelled the honey-like aroma of tobacco as it hangs in a curing barn or witnessed the focus of cigar rollers in action as they toil at their rolling tables then you've yet to take your cigar appreciation to the next level. Normally, most cigar factories and tobacco fields in this country are closed to the public, but the festival is a time of hospitality and unusual transparency. Cigarmakers open their doors, giving you full access to their operation, from cigar factories to tobacco fields. While the five-day festival begins in La Romana, most of the action takes place during the second leg, in Santiago. Almost every major cigar company in the Dominican Republic participates. Each night, there's a big cigar



La Aurora Cigar World



Saga Restaurant & Cigar Club

dinner where all the attendees and industry members converge. The dinners go late, the dancing goes later, the music is loud and you are always flush with cigars—sometimes even more cigars than you can comfortably carry.

Visit procigar.org

RECOMMENDED RESTAURANTS

There's no better way to connect with local culture than through its cuisine. This is especially true in the city of Santiago, where certain dishes help to define the region's identity. But the search for authentic experiences can sometimes be confusing, if not intimidating, especially for less adventurous diners. Here are some of our favorites, as well as those of Santiago's cigarmakers.

Barttola Brasserie

"Everything is spectacular," says La Flor Dominicana maker Litto Gomez, a frequent guest of Barttola. The menu is broad, with eclectic choices ranging from miniature tacos to risotto with *chivo* (goat). Chef Francisco Javier Cabrera Pérez has a Michelin star from his previous work in Spain. The cigar-friendly terrace is ideal for puffing while you dine.

Av. 27 de Febrero, Jardín Plaza, (809) 971-9294



Il Pasticcio Cucina Italiana

The reason you can smoke in the backroom of this pleasant bistro on a quiet street is that years ago cigarmaker Carlos Fuente Sr. was so impressed with the cuisine that he offered to enlarge the space and make a cigar room. Walk inside and you'll likely be greeted by gregarious host Paolo Modolo. Once the food begins hitting the table you will smile. Each bite is artfully done, reflecting the creativity of the owner.

Av. El Llano Esquina Calle 3, Cerros de Gurabo, (809) 806-1277

La Campagna

You may find yourself at La Campagna for breakfast and then again for lunch in the same day. The restaurant's *desayuno Criollo* (native breakfast) is a gut-filling combo and the restaurant makes a great Cuban sandwich. You can smoke under the thatched roof.

*Av. Juan Pablo Duarte
(809) 724-2353*

La Parrillita

Mofongo might be an odd-sounding word to Americans, but it's a beloved, starchy staple in the Dominican Republic (see page 92) and an essential must-eat if you want to dine like a local. A good place to start your *mofongo* research would be La Parrillita, which serves it five different ways.

*Av. Juan Pablo Duarte 162
(809) 583-1925*

La Trattoria de Claudio

Italian cuisine is particularly strong in the Dominican Republic, and you'll find superb Italian fare at Trattoria Claudio. The open kitchen to this centrally located restaurant

features a large brick oven, which produces superb pizzas. Just off the entrance is a covered terrace, where cigars are welcome.

Calle Eusebio Manzueta n. 12 | Los Jardines, (809) 581-1602

Mar y Fuego

Mar y Fuego is a cigar-friendly Spanish restaurant with a strong emphasis on fish, serving up dishes like Galician-style octopus and grilled langoustines. Diners rave about the paella.

Lic. Agustin Acevedo, (809) 736-4488

Noah Restaurant and Lounge

Noah is visually striking, and its ceviches and risottos are particularly good. Cigarmaker Manuel "Manolo" Quesada goes there for quality sushi. "It's hard to get sushi in Santiago," he says. The restaurant has an area up front where smoking is allowed.

Calle del Sol Esquina Francia, (809) 971-0550

Pedro Restaurant

Spain may be the birthplace of paella, but Santiago has co-opted the classic rice dish. Abe Flores says Pedro serves a solid rendition, and in a cigar-friendly atmosphere. Be sure to get a table in Pedro's smoking room. It's a closed-off area of the restaurant where your cigars can happily coexist with your crustaceans.

Salome Ureña #18, Los Jardines, (809) 582-2144

Restaurante El Zaguán

As one of the Dominican Republic's national dishes, *mofongo* is available almost everywhere in Santiago. According to Ernesto Perez-Carrillo, you'll need to leave town a bit if you really want to experience the gold standard. The casual, ranch-style restaurant in question is called El Zaguán, and it's in the La Vega Province, which is about a 25-minute drive from downtown Santiago. They simply stick to script and make it with traditional technique and national pride—no different than the country's cigarmakers.

Av. Pedro A. Rivera, Concepción de La Vega 41000, (809) 573-5508

Saga Restaurant & Cigar Club

You smell it first, and hear it soon after. It's beef—great beef—sizzling in protest against the phonebook-sized slab of salt that it sits upon. The salt is black and angry, holding what seems like the heat of 100 suns, and the meat is thick and juicy, its fat oozing onto the salt and adding even more aroma to the air. Welcome to Saga, home of the Cowboy Steak. The Tomahawk-style ribeye is the trademark dish of a restaurant that will change the way you feel about a meal in Santiago.

Saga takes cigar friendly to a new level. The standout wine list comes in a cigar box, and smoking is welcome here. It won't surprise you that it is owned by cigarmakers: Augusto "Fufi" Reyes and his daughter Nirka, from De Los Reyes cigars. The restaurant has an upscale, modern décor, and there's far more to the menu than beef. There are pastas and risotto as well as sushi, *croquetas* made with decadent *jamón ibérico* and more.

Saga is among the more expensive places to eat in the city, and deservedly so. ♦

24, Av. Benito Juarez, (809) 276-7900

DR TRAVEL TIP



Dominican Pesos

The first time you see prices in the Dominican Republic, your eyes will pop out of your head. Those numbers are in RD\$, aka Dominican pesos, and at press time it took nearly 50 of them to make one U.S. dollar. That burger that looks like it costs \$430? It's about \$8.50.

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LA ROMANA

Casa de Campo

This oasis has something for nearly every desire,
including doing nothing at all **BY DAVID SAVONA**



The infinity pool stretches out before you, cool and inviting. You light your cigar as a waiter brings an icy cocktail, and peruse the day's menu, pondering your next move. At Casa de Campo, the choices are considerable. The resort is vast—7,000 acres—and all guests are assigned a personal golf cart upon check in. You may be here for golf, but the cart is not for the course. You'll use it to get around the property.

The resort has a little bit of everything, first and foremost some of the finest golf in the Caribbean (see page 86). Casa de Campo opened in 1974 as an executive retreat for conglomerate Gulf + Western. If you stayed here many years ago and think you know Casa de Campo, you don't. A \$40 million renovation in 2011 resulted in better rooms, a better pool and a stunning new lobby. In 2017, more money still was invested. And while there are the things you would expect—beach, pool, tennis—there are also the items you just won't find in most other places. The equestrian

center allows for everything from a simple, pleasant ride with the family to expert polo lessons. Casa de Campo's 245-acre shooting center is set up with Beretta shotguns and expert guides. Of course, one of the best choices may be to do nothing. Recently renovated and redesigned, the new Minitas Beach Club has the look of a restaurant in St. Barths or Miami. The food here is quite good, the wine list is short but workable, and the cocktails are better than one would expect in the typical resort setting.

While the rooms are superb, for extra luxury—or for larger parties—Casa de Campo has a vast selection of villas, ranging in size from three to 10 bedrooms. Each has a private pool, some are on the ocean and others overlook one of the golf courses. All of them come with maid service and breakfast prepared in the villa.

The resort proper has several restaurants. In addition to the fine dining at the beach, there is La Caña (right off the lobby), which offers a pleasant meal in a beautiful setting overlooking



the main pool, and for ambiance it's hard to find a more gorgeous spot than La Piazzetta, a traditional Italian restaurant overlooking Altos de Chavón, a quaint village with the look of a European city.

For cigar smokers, the resort is quite cigar friendly. Most rooms have balconies where you can relax with your evening smoke, and most of the dining facilities have outdoor areas where your cigar is welcome. There's also no shortage of places to buy a cigar at Casa de Campo, and if you're interested in seeing how great cigars are made, tours can easily be arranged, for you're next door to Tabacalera de Garcia, one of the world's largest cigar factories.

Home to such iconic brands as Montecristo, Romeo y Julieta and many others, tours to Tabacalera de Garcia are handled by Cigar Country Tours. The

DR TRAVEL TIP



Bring A Nice Shirt

You won't need a suit, but it's good to bring dress clothes—It's not all beaches and resorts. While you're on vacation, nice restaurants require dressing well.

operator will arrange for you to see all the aspects of cigar construction from the preliminary steps of sorting raw tobacco to the actual cigar rolling, and even the final packaging stages.

Two tours are available: the extensive Tabacalera de Garcia factory tour and the smaller Vega Fina Experience, which focuses on Vega Finas. Keep in mind, you can't take any photos at Tabacalera de Garcia, and there's even a dress code: long pants, and no sandals or open-toe shoes of any kind. Looking at all those cigars will get you in the mood to purchase one, no doubt, and the tour operator also owns a store complete with a smoking lounge in which to puff. Cigars are available for purchase, duty free, at the Cigar Country Megastore. ❖
casadecampo.com and cigarcountrytours.com

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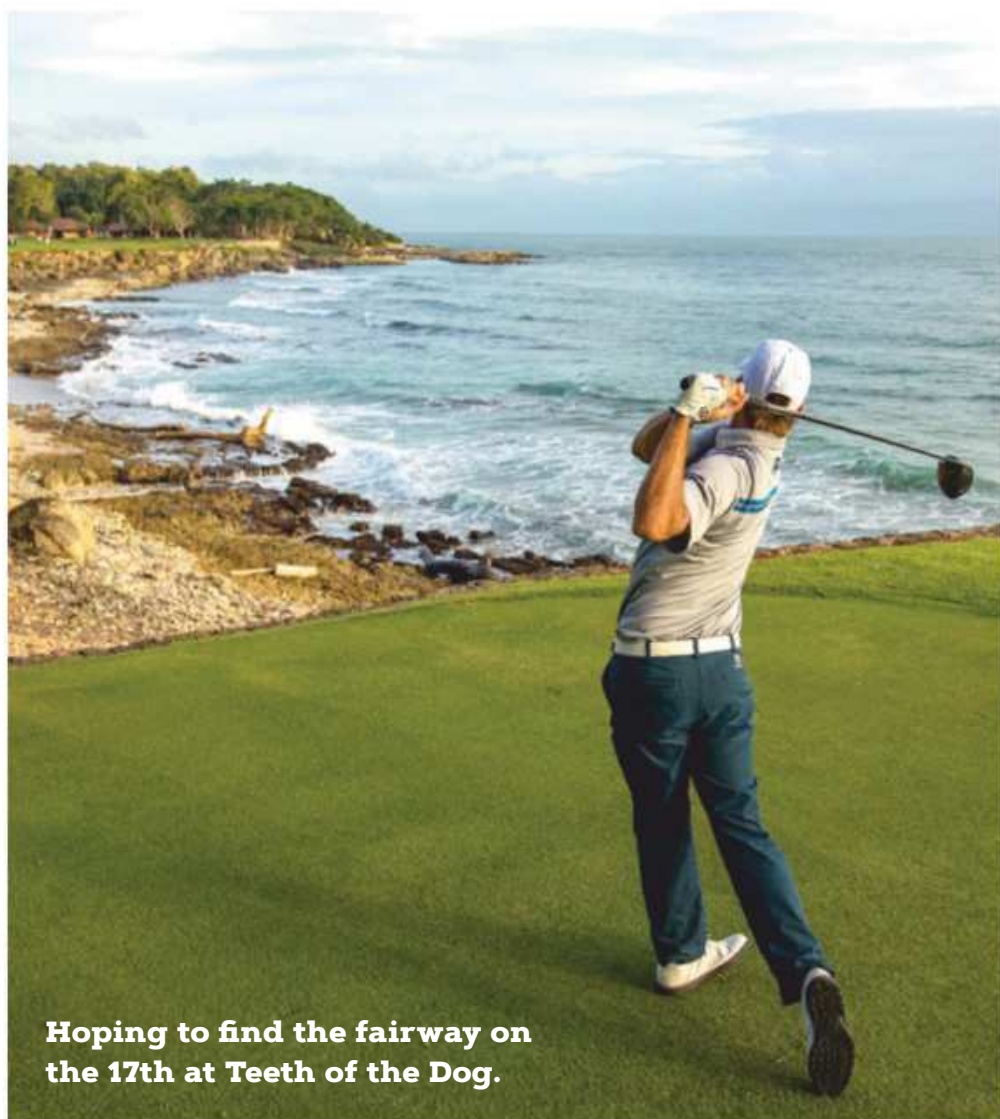
Golfer's Paradise

With three golf courses—including the best in the Dominican Republic—Casa de Campo is tailor made for a long golf trip **BY DAVID SAVONA**

The right side of the fairway is jagged, as if a towering sea god had risen from the crystal blue waters of the Caribbean to rend the earth with his mighty, clawed hands, removing safe landing areas for your golf ball. Welcome to the 17th hole at Teeth of the Dog in Casa de Campo.

The resort has three golf courses, the best of which is this one, which has been delighting and challenging golfers since it opened in 1971. Designed by Pete Dye, the course was created by more than 300 workers over the span of a year. As legend goes, the workers noted the bite of the sharp coral near the sea, calling it *dientes del perro*, Spanish for “teeth of the dog,” and the course had its name.

More than coral bites here. Seven of the holes are on the water, and aside from the obvious peril of putting a shot into the ocean, those seaside holes make for tough conditions. One of the more striking holes is the fifth, a short par 3 that has a tee box and



Hoping to find the fairway on the 17th at Teeth of the Dog.



green that both jut into the water. The entire carry is over lapping waves, and one day those ocean breezes can be tamed with a wedge, while on others it could call for a five-iron. Watch the winds, and listen to the caddies, who are long on experience here. Playing from the black tees, the course stretches more than 7,300 yards and has a well-earned 140 slope rating.

One of the many beauties of playing Teeth of the Dog is its convenience. If you're staying at Casa de Campo, the golf course is mere steps away from Lago Grill, the thatched-hut breakfast restaurant at the resort. No need to budget travel time in; drive your golf cart up to the facility and walk into the pro shop, past the statue of Pete Dye, the course designer.

In the past, warming up before your round was a straightforward affair. There was a large putting green, and a sizeable



No. 7, one of Teeth's many seaside holes.

driving range. But in May 2018, Casa de Campo unveiled a marvelous new Golf Learning Center, spread across 21 acres of grass. Run by Charlie Epps (who coached two-time major winner Angel Cabrera) the Center has indoor and outdoor hitting bays, swing lessons, golf fitting, all you need to tune up your game before a round—or to take some serious lessons.

The gear here is now top-notch. Rent a set and you'll be playing with gleaming new Titleist irons and woods, and you'll warm up with Pro V1s in the learning center.

There are few downsides to playing golf here. Yes, the pace of play can be slow, but that's understandable given the desire to snap photos of the stunning vistas. And after the one-two-three punch of the gorgeous 15th, 16th and 17th holes, the inland 18th is a somewhat disappointing finish. But a round here will show

you why *Golf Digest* calls Teeth of the Dog the best golf course in the entire Dominican Republic. A round costs \$250 in season for hotel guests, \$395 for non-guests.

Bring more balls than you think you need, as those ocean holes tend to devour your Titleists. After you finish, stop at the grill house, which serves a surprisingly good Cuban sandwich and has a small selection of cigars for sale. Order a cold drink and light your cigar. You've earned it.

Dye Fore

If you're spending serious time at Casa de Campo, you must also play Dye Fore. Opened in 2004, this course is also picturesque, but you'll see more green and less blue than on Teeth. Rather than the ocean, the course abuts the Chavón River.



Dye Fore

DR TRAVEL TIP



The Winters Are Lovely

The average temperature in the DR is a sublime 77 degrees Fahrenheit. Our favorite times to visit are during late winter and early spring, when it's cold and snowy up north and the DR tends to be dry and sunny, with temperatures reaching the mid 80s. Summers are very hot and can be rainy, and bring the risk of hurricane season.

Dye Fore (\$236 a round in season for guests) has an 18-hole course and a nine-hole course, and each set of nine is named for nearby landmarks, Lagos, Marina and Chavón. The 18 holer is a 7,700-yard monster from the back tees, with a 139 slope and a 76.8 rating. Seven of the holes feature views of the Chavón River, some 300 feet below. You'll also see the mountains, the marina and the sea in the distance.

Dye Fore isn't as close to the main resort as Teeth, but you can drive your cart the 20 minutes or so to the facility, or take a shuttle. It lacked a pro shop until recently, but now it has its own area to buy balls and other golf gear, and the resort was in the process of building a short-game area on site for warming up as well.

After your round, consider exploring nearby Altos de Chavón, which features several restaurants and shops.

The Links

The third course at Casa de Campo isn't in the same league as its bigger brothers, but it's fine to play if you're looking to mix it up. Not as busy as the other two, The Links (\$150 a round) is also a good choice if you're playing with your children or newcomers to



The Links

the game who could benefit from an easier track. Located just next to the pro shop, it shares the convenience of Teeth.

While the course plays easy from the upper tees, played from the longest of the five tee boxes, The Links is no pushover. Playing from the tips, the course is as long as Teeth of the Dog, but the slope rating is only 133, and you won't have to contend with the wavering winds from the ocean.

"At least 50 percent [of visitors] play Teeth of the Dog," says Robert Birtel, director of golf operations for Casa de Campo. "If they're on a golf trip, they play all three."

Improvement continues on all three courses, Birtel says, with an irrigation project nearing completion. By May of 2019, he says, "all three will have full irrigation." GPS systems are being added to the golf carts. ❖

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RODRÍGUEZ



Mangú



Vestida de Novia



Chivo



Mofongo

Dining Like a Dominican

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA AND DAVID SAVONA

You can get great steak, Italian and other worldly cuisines in the Dominican Republic, but whenever we visit we also indulge in traditional Dominican fare.

Mangú

You'll see *mangú* (pronounced main-goo) on just about every breakfast menu in the Dominican Republic. We'll admit—the beige, lumpy pile is not a looker, but this is a filling breakfast we've grown to love. Mangú is made from mashed, green plantains topped with vinegary red onions and is typically served with eggs. It's an ideal way to prepare for a day of smoking cigars.

Sancocho

It's earthy, it's elemental and it's one of those dishes at the core of Dominican cuisine. *Sancocho* is a hearty stew made from a variety of meats that can include pork, beef, sausage and chicken. It's cooked slowly to tenderize the proteins and to fortify the heavy, brownish broth with meaty richness. You'll also find large pieces of yucca, and it's served with rice.

Roast Pig

While many have had pork chops and bacon, the pig-eating experience changes drastically once you've had the whole hog—namely the flavor goes up by many degrees.

In the Dominican Republic, the pig is cooked for hours until chunks and shreds of meat fall off the bone. But it doesn't end there. The porcine joy of a pig roast comes from getting a piece with the crispy, salty skin, called *chicharrones*, guaranteeing each bite will be equal parts crunchy skin, luscious meat and unctuous fat.

Mofongo

This mash of plantains is studded with chunks of fried pork rind and ridiculously tantalizing amounts of garlic. This is the type of dish you eat later in the day, ideally *al fresco* with an icy cold beer and a good Dominican cigar.

Chivo

In Spanish, it means goat. And when you ask for *chivo* in the Dominican Republic, it normally comes braised in a tomato-based stock to meaty, fall-off-the-bone effect. It's made with the animal's fattier cuts to ensure it stays tender throughout the long cooking process. The result is something not as gamey as lamb, not as safe as beef and probably one of the tastiest braised meats you'll ever have.

Vestida de Novia

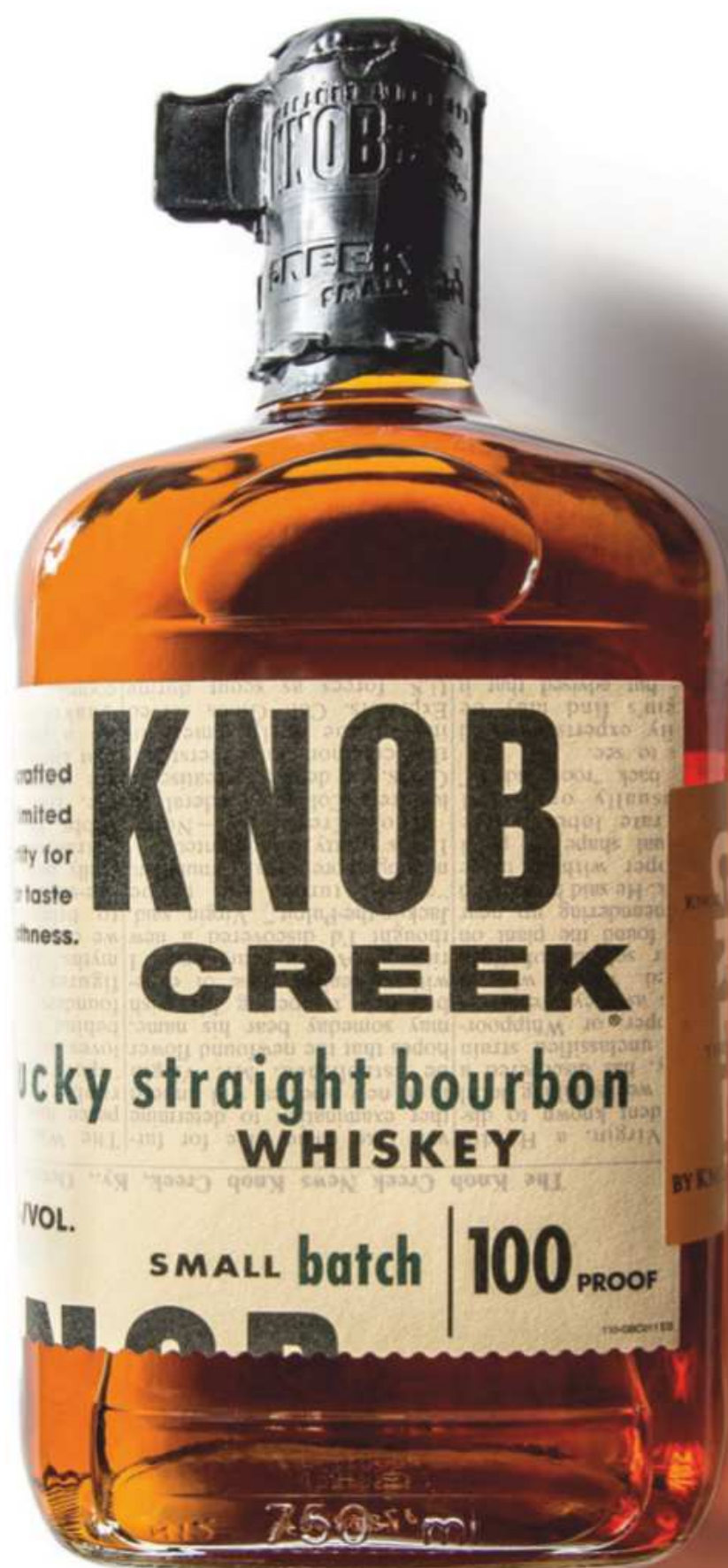
Nothing refreshes like an ice-cold beer on a hot day, and when you're in the Dominican Republic your beer of choice should be Presidente. This easy sipping pilsner is ubiquitous in the country, and despite occasional power failures an exceptionally cold one is never far away. How cold? There's a common expression in the Dominican Republic for a Presidente with a thin layer of frost—*vestida de novia*, slang for “the dress of the bride.” A sip on a hot day and you may wish to propose.

The Three Bs of Rum: Barceló, Bermudez & Brugal

Ron means rum in the Dominican Republic, and this rum-producing country has three major brands: Barceló, Bermudez and Brugal. When sipping it neat it pays to go with the premium pours: Brugal 1888 Gran Reserva, Barceló Imperial and Ron Bermudez Aniversario. ♦

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SANTO DOMINGO

The Colonial City by the Sea

Santo Domingo, capital of the Dominican Republic, has a stunning mix of beauty and style for the cigar lover

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER GARRITANO

The Plaza de España showcases the beauty and energy of Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic.



Hodelpa Nicolás de Ovando



The ABAM factory's Villiger Lounge

A statue of Nicolás de Ovando stands atop a marble base in the middle of a piazza that dates back to the 16th century. Cast in bronze, he's a bit shorter and a bit stouter than his famous contemporary Christopher Columbus, but his pose and dark patina are no less dignified.

Columbus might get all the glory for discovering the New World, but here in the colonial section of Santo Domingo, Ovando is the real rock star. A respected figure in this part of the Dominican Republic, Ovando helped to found the capital city of Santo Domingo and is properly memorialized for it.

Cigars aside, one of Santo Domingo's biggest attractions is its famed Colonial City, a seaside district set on the Ozama River whose ancient fortresses and massive defensive walls have miraculously survived modernization, making this part of town the oldest permanent European settlement in the Americas.

Here are our preferred spots for enjoying this special city.

RECOMMENDED HOTEL

Hodelpa Nicolás de Ovando

Here's a curious fact: Santo Domingo claims to be home of the first, and oldest, paved road of the Americas. The road is called Calle Las Damas, or "street of the ladies." On that street is Hodelpa Nicolás de Ovando, a hotel built in 1502 and the former home of the Spanish nobleman and governor responsible for so much of the city's beauty.

After standing for more than 500 years, the Nicolás de Ovando hotel has been upgraded to include all the amenities of a modern facility without losing its historical character. The beauty lies in both its overall architecture and the attention to details—ornate arcades open up to outdoor, cigar-friendly courtyards tiled in terra-cotta, while interiors are appointed with tapestries, iron candelabras and other period furnishings to enhance the Spanish colonial ambience. Rooms begin at \$140 per night, in season.

Calle las Damas, Colonial City, (888) 403-2603

RECOMMENDED CIGAR ATTRACTIONS

ABAM Factory

One of the main star cigar attractions of Santo Domingo is undoubtedly the ABAM factory. This is the place where Villiger produces most of its premium cigars, most notably the Flor de Ynclan, which was named the No. 10 Cigar of the Year by CIGAR AFICIONADO for its Robusto size last year. It's a short car ride outside of the colonial district in the northern part of the city.

A scheduled visit will get you a tour of the factory, a bunch of cigars and drinks at the bar in the factory's second-story lounge. Like most cigar factory tours, you'll get to see how tobacco is treated along its entire industrial journey before it becomes a finished cigar.

In addition to serving as Villiger's primary producer of premium cigars, ABAM is the home of the Villiger Lounge, a beautifully appointed walk-up space located on the second level of the factory. It overlooks the factory floor with a great panoramic view of the rolling gallery.

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BORIS WINTERMANS

SERIE SIGNATURAS

DUETO is the result of a special collaboration between two of the most passionate and dedicated Dominican boutique premium cigar makers, Ernesto Pérez-Carrillo and Boris Wintermans. While each cigar maker has a unique and distinguished personal tobacco history, they share the philosophy that relentless, passionate curiosity is essential to discovering and enjoying the best life has to offer.

Blended by the legendary Ernesto Pérez-Carrillo to excite the senses, DUETO captures the complex intersection of two distinct premium cigar blending signatures. Incorporating each cigar makers' hand-selected, preferred tobaccos, this cigar blend delivers a special, one-of-a-kind sensorial experience for the curious – the signature elegant robustness of Ernesto Pérez-Carrillo cigars and the signature balance of sophisticated complexity and smoothness of Boris Wintermans' Balmoral handmade cigars.

#CuriosityDrivesDiscovery

BALMORALCIGARS.COM   

According to lounge lore, the gnarly tree-trunk base used for one of the tables was repurposed from a tree that used to belong to former Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo. *Zona Franca Industrial de Villa Mella Nave #6, Buena Vista Primera, Villa Mella (809) 569-9494*

Arturo Fuente Cigar Club

If there is an ultimate monument to all things Fuente it's the Arturo Fuente Cigar Club, which is probably the most upscale cigar bar in the entire country. It's a bi-level building with common areas downstairs, private lounges on the second floor, conference rooms, a bar-restaurant and even a stage for live performances.

The humidor is flush with entire verticals of Fuente, Don Carlos and Fuente Fuente OpusX cigars, as well as hard-to-find OpusX sizes, and at very reasonable prices (or at least reasonable for OpusX).

The club is the brainchild of Ciro Cascella, a Dominican restaurateur and businessman who also serves as executive vice president of Fuente's cigar operations in the Dominican Republic. Start with a cigar and a drink in the intimate atmosphere of the common seating areas before getting a bite to eat at the bar-restaurant and attenuating the night with more cocktails and cigars. We recommend that your clothes match the environment. You don't have to wear a suit and tie, but it wouldn't be out of place. This is not a spot to wear your shorts and flip-flops.

Av. 27 de Febrero No. 211, Ens. Naco, (809) 683-2771

RECOMMENDED RESTAURANTS

La Cassina

If you're spending a few days in Santo Domingo and wish to eat beyond the walls of the colonial district, we suggest stopping by La Cassina, a Mediterranean restaurant with plenty of atmosphere and a great kitchen that takes its pasta and risotto as seriously as its meat and fish. No matter what you order, be sure to sit outside in their garden-like oasis where smoking is more than welcome.

Av. Roberto Pastoriza 504, (809) 363-4444

Restaurante 1502

Restaurante 1502 at Nicolás de Ovando offers fine dining in the convenience of the best hotel in Santo Domingo. The room is quaint and the cooking seems to court the Michelin star set by attempting to elevate traditional Dominican fare. It's certainly one



Arturo Fuente Cigar Club

of the fancier options in town. All the seats in this restaurant are indoors, meaning your cigar is not welcome while you dine, but cigar-friendly courtyards and bars are just a few steps away.

Calle las Damas, Colonial City, (888) 403-2603

DR TRAVEL TIP



Don't Buy Cubans

Don't buy Cuban cigars in the DR. Distribution of real Cubans in the Dominican Republic is spotty, and there are many fakes. Besides, you're there to explore the Dominican Republic as a tobacco destination of origin. Also, Dominicans take great pride in their cigars. Asking for a Cuban could be insulting.

Pat'e Palo

Take a short walk through the picturesque city streets of Santo Domingo and make your way to the Plaza de España, a gorgeous square abuzz with casual restaurants situated right on the piazza. We recommend getting an outdoor table at Pat'e Palo. There are plenty of safety options on the menu like steaks, salmon and even a burger, but the native dishes are far more interesting and immersive. Be sure to try their *chivo encendío*, a hearty, signature entrée of stewed goat and risotto.

Feel free to light up a cigar at the table before, during or after your meal. The waiters won't give you any trouble. They'll simply give you an ashtray.

Plaza Espana, Ciudad Colonial (809) 687-8089 ♦

PLAYA GRANDE

Dominican Deluxe

Aman Resorts has created a world-class, luxury retreat in a quiet part of the northern coast of the Dominican Republic **BY LARRY OLMSTED**

Three decades ago, Adrian Zecha's search for a beachfront home in Phuket, Thailand, led him to open a small resort he called Amanpuri. The term "boutique resort" was not yet in vogue, but the escapist luxury property drew a passionate and loyal following. Today, there are now almost 30 Aman Resorts worldwide, and "Aman junkies" are among the most devoted customers in travel. The brand spans four continents, with urban properties, mountain properties, and even UNESCO World Heritage Sites. But one luxury travel niche Aman has lacked has been a golf property—until now.

The Dominican Republic has long been the king of Caribbean golf, but its hidden gem is the Playa Grande Golf Course, a stunning Robert Trent Jones Sr. clifftop design on the country's less-visited north shore. Evocative of a tropical Pebble Beach, it

debuted two decades ago, anchored by a long defunct hotel. "In this particular case, the destination and location provided us with the perfect opportunity where we could provide an experience on par with our brand," says Aman CEO Olivier Jolivet. "The foundation of this course already had a rich history, which we wanted to bring back to life."

They turned to the famed designer's son, Rees Jones. The original hotel stood in the middle of the course, but with it gone, Jones was able to completely replace the few less-than-thrilling holes, moving the inland 14th to the edge of the sea, kicking off a five-hole, clifftop finish unrivalled in a sport where three consecutive oceanfront holes is considered excessive. Playa Grande has an amazing 10 coastal holes. When the new Amanera resort opened just before Christmas 2015, the Playa Grande Golf





Course was immediately acclaimed as one of the best in the entire Caribbean. But that wasn't enough for Aman—it just brought Jones back for another comprehensive overhaul for peak fall season 2018, including a complete re-grassing, better drainage, all new sand for the bunkers, extensive decorative landscaping, new greens or tees on half a dozen holes and two new luxury “comfort stations” with farm-to-table delicacies and custom cocktails.

Membership at the course is limited to owners of Amanera residences, and a few specialty selected non-residents. Aside from members, Amanera hotel guests are the only other players allowed access to the course, making tee times here essentially irrelevant. It has caddies, exclusivity, and a rare mix of stunning beauty, forgiving playability and dramatic daily changes based on wind. It is simply a stunning golf experience.

The resort itself is no slouch, with some two dozen decadent guest casitas with private pools, outdoor showers and dining areas, and first-class amenities. Service is far above the usual Caribbean standard, and white-glove treatment begins when you land. Flying into Puerto Plata (90 minutes from the resort) every arriving guest is met planeside by a VIP host and escorted to a hospitality lounge with snacks, cold drinks and cocktails, while staffers recover your

DR TRAVEL TIP



DR Time

Sometimes the clocks match Eastern Standard Time, but because the Dominican Republic doesn't follow Daylight Saving Time, you will have to adjust your watch ahead one hour when you travel during peak season.

luggage. Immigration and customs are expedited, and soon you are taken to a waiting chauffeured Mercedes, well worth the \$200 per car transfer rate. (Guests can also fly into Samana or Santo Domingo, but those airports don't have the VIP lounge, and Santo Domingo is nearly twice as far away.)

If there is one theme throughout the resort, it is emptiness: restaurants, bars, the infinity pool, and the beach are grossly oversized. The 2,000-acre resort has

plenty to wow non-golfers, including a private beach, private hiking trails that lead to a private picnic cabin on Aman's private mountain, and in-house guides for yoga, pilates, cooking classes and more. There is a lavish spa—an Aman trademark—and the Salon del Tabaco cigar lounge, which has cigarmaking demonstrations and a custom puro, hand rolled in four sizes. ❖

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PUNTA CANA

The Punta Cana Experience

Emanating from one developer's golf dream, this Dominican outpost now offers two of the Caribbean's best courses **BY JEFF WILLIAMS**

Jack Nicklaus' vision comes to the Dominican Republic at Punta Espada.





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As Frank Rainieri went about realizing his dream by developing what would be called Punta Cana on the northeastern tip of the Dominican Republic, he would sometimes find himself on a low-lying cliff with a small cove beneath him awash with the turquoise waters of the Caribbean.

It was here he came to dream more than 50 years ago, when he was putting together the plans that swirled in his mind about building a luxury resort with all the amenities that went with it.

That little spot is now part of the Corales Golf Club, one of the finest golf destinations in the world. And while Punta Cana may not yet be as famous as its neighbor Casa de Campo, the area has its own world-class golf, and it's all part of Frank Rainieri's world-class dreams.

"Our golf courses, we know they appeal to people who love life, love fine things and who want the best," says Rainieri, a cigar lover who not only owns the Puntacana Resort & Club, but also the local airport. (He's such an ardent fan of cigars, it was his idea to have the Westin Hotel add a cigar bar, called Don Queco.) Rainieri isn't a golfer but he can occasionally be found driving around his courses, admiring the landscape and smoking a cigar. He knows what people visiting Punta Cana want. "Many of them," he says, "want a fine golf course and fine cigars."

Over the years Punta Cana has added much in the way of golf. Two of its courses are extraordinary—the Corales Golf Club, designed by Tom Fazio, and the Punta Espada Golf Club, designed by Jack Nicklaus. Corales is part of Rainieri's Puntacana Resort & Club, which also includes the original La Cana course, a fine resort layout by P.B. Dye, son of Pete Dye. The Punta Espada course is part of a separate development known as Cap Cana and all three courses can be packaged together.

"If there is bucket-list golf, certainly Corales and Punta Espada would fall in that category," says Jay Overton, a former PGA Tour player and the resident pro at Corales. "If we aren't one and two in the Caribbean, the combination of being able to play both within minutes of each other makes us No. 1. It would be like putting Pinehurst and Pebble Beach side by side."

Corales and Punta Espada are what you might expect when top-flight designers like Tom Fazio and Jack Nicklaus work with spectacular sites.

At Corales, six holes play along the Caribbean—the seventh through ninth and the 16th through 18th. This is a trademark Fazio course with very wide fairways and multiple tees that give golfers of all handicaps a chance. There are a few alternate greens.

The back tees on the par-4 18th require a substantial carry over a cove whose waters can get pretty angry, a challenge that PGA

Tour players face in the Corales Puntacana Resort & Club Championship, a PGA Tour event played on the course in March. Because Fazio hates cart paths the holes have a distinct separation.

A caddie is mandatory at Corales and they are well versed in the course and the game, and excellent companions to boot. Only about 10,000 rounds a year are played between members and hotel guests. Guests of Tortuga Bay and the Westin Puntacana Hotel have automatic access and the course also has a membership roster.

Punta Espada has all the elements of drama and style associated with Nicklaus' design work. Those who have played Nicklaus' Punta Mita course near Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, will



The views are striking at the ninth at Corales, designed by Tom Fazio.

find Punta Espada very familiar. Nicklaus has been given substantial seaside property to work with and has taken full advantage of it. That is nowhere more apparent than on the back tees of the par-5 second hole, where the limestone has been raised by an ancient upheaval, making the views breathtaking.

The connection with the water couldn't be closer than at the par-3 13th, which is mindful of Robert Trent Jones' oceanfront par 3 at Mauna Kea in Hawaii. The hole requires a carry over the Caribbean to a green planted on a ledge above the water. From the back tee this is a 250-yarder, and the prevailing winds are often in your face.

The original 18 at La Cana is where P.B. takes some cues from his father Pete. Enough quirkiness is here to label it a Dye course, with an island par 3 and an island par 4. It touches briefly against



Puntacana Resort's Tortuga Bay



Eden Roc's Blue Grill and Bar

the sea on the front nine, then plays alongside it over the final two holes. The par-4 seventh has a pot-bunkered approach area and a green surrounded by sand. Dye calls the pot-bunkering Hecklebirnie after a purgatory of Scottish lore.

The accompanying luxurious accommodations are well up to the standard. Rainieri's original Puntacana Resort & Club, now a Westin marketed property, is fabulously supplemented by the decidedly upscale Tortuga Bay Club, a collection of 13 villa structures that front the Caribbean.

The hotel, a member of Leading Hotels of the World, is the country's only AAA Five Diamond hotel. It's embraced largely by both the Corales and the La Cana courses and has recently undergone a revitalization in the spirit of the late Dominican-born fashion designer Oscar de la Renta, who was a friend and neighbor of Rainieri, and a huge proponent of Punta Cana.

All 30 rooms have kitchenettes, plush but casual furniture, linens and bathroom amenities. Each villa has a manager/concierge as well as a golf cart and bikes.

A major amenity, and an absolute boon to the luxury traveler, is what the hotel calls its Whisking Service, which moves guests through the airport both on arrival and departure with complete ease, avoiding long lines for ticketing and security. (After all, it is Frank Rainieri's airport.) Together with limousine service, it gets guests to their rooms in about 20 minutes.

Right next door to the Punta Espada course is the luxury Eden

Roc Hotel, which opened in 2013. The acquisition of a beach club in 2015 has added beachfront suites and villas right next to the golf course. The Eden Roc, technically in Cap Cana, is part of the Relais & Chateaux group.

The 26 posh beachfront suites, posh and attuned to the sea that they serve, are enveloped by oceanfront golf holes. The 34 boutique suites that are off the water each have their own pools. High ceilings, wood beams and expansive windows assure connection to the outdoors. There are up to four bedrooms in the boutique suites, two in the beachfront suites.

Golf packages at Eden Roc, Tortuga Bay and Puntacana Hotel include play on the courses at each of the resorts. The Eden Roc has one package, called Golf and Gastronomy, that combines golf with fine meals.

Less expensive alternatives to this luxury triangle include the Hard Rock Hotel, which has quite a nice golf course of its own, the Hard Rock Golf Club at Cana Bay. It's by Nicklaus Design (which means Jack wasn't a direct participant in its design or build), but it has a lot of the signature Nicklaus characteristics, including wide fairways. With a little less tranquility, but more action, the all-inclusive Hard Rock is a big place—1,790 rooms—and is located at the northern end of the Bávaro Beach resort strip. Keeping with the Hard Rock theme, the hotel offers a “Sound Of Your Stay” experience, which includes a Fender guitar delivered to your room. It might be just the thing you need to shake off the frustration

of a few three-putts.

The Punta Blanca Golf & Beach Club includes a course by Nick Price that winds through native vegetation and rocky outcrops and along wetlands. Despite its many hazards, the fairways are wide enough that most players should have enough room to play through them. Two island par 3s (13 and 15) are probably the best holes on the course.

Rainieri dreamt of a paradise on the Dominican Republic's north shore and so five decades later it has become just that. Whether it be hotels, restaurants, cigar bars, beach clubs or golf courses, the Rainieri family holdings share a distinct signature.

“Simple elegance,” he says, “with Punta Cana style.” ❖

Jeff Williams is a contributing editor for CIGAR AFICIONADO.

DR TRAVEL TIP



The Ashtray Request

While indoor spaces of many restaurants won't allow your cigar, there's no shortage of cigar-friendly places throughout the Dominican Republic. The Spanish word for ashtray is one to remember: *cenicero* (sehn-ee-SERR-roh). Ask your waiter for *un cenicero por favor* as you take out your cigar case, and you'll look like a natural.

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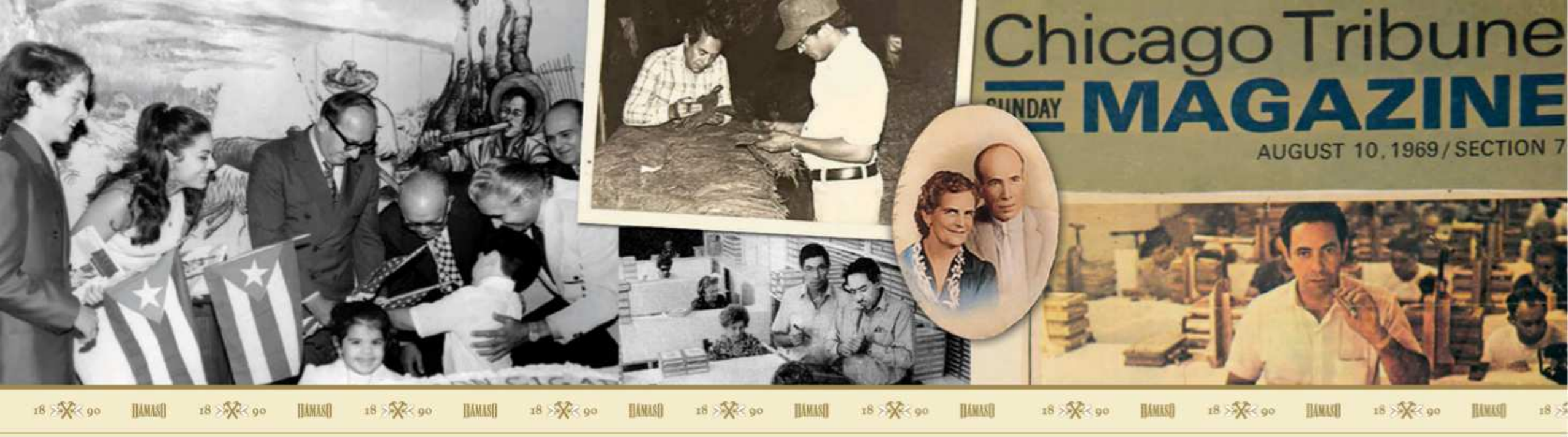


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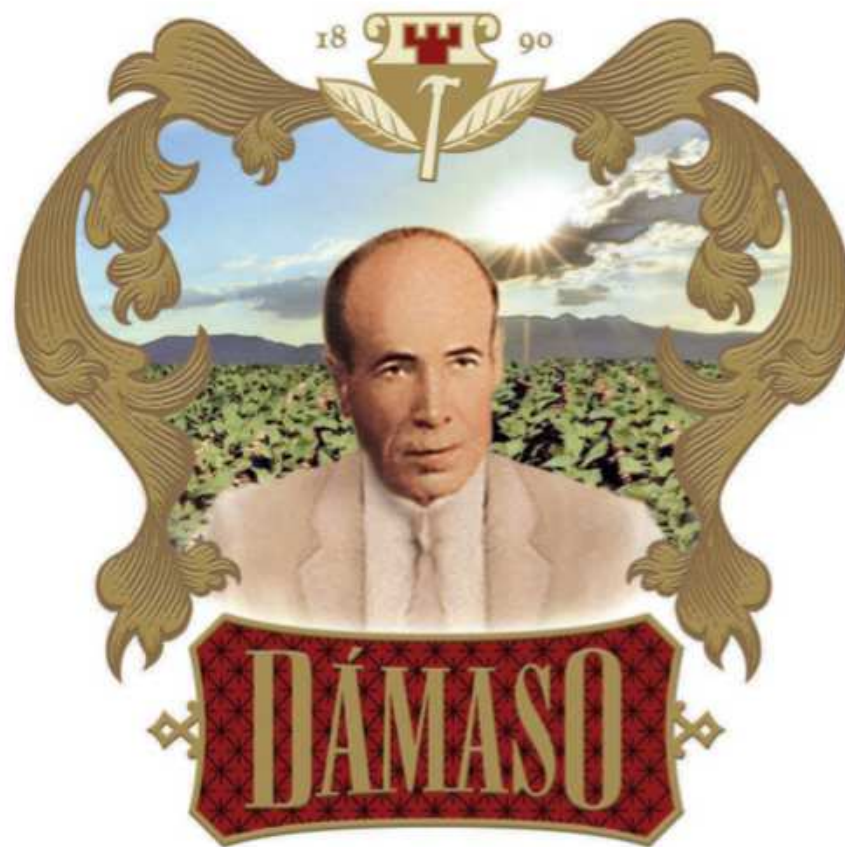
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Was Tiger Woods' victory in the Tour Championship on September 23 the greatest comeback in sports history? It was, to be sure, huge. Even more, it was Hoganesque.

Only 18 months before the win, Woods could barely move, let alone swing a golf club. "I was beyond playing. I couldn't sit. I couldn't walk. I couldn't lay down without feeling the pain in my back and my leg," he says. In April 2017, he was lying on an operating table undergoing spinal fusion surgery, an operation that finally seemed to end years of physical and emotional agony, years that he no longer competed like the all-time great with 14 major championships, years that he barely competed at all.

But a year and a half after that surgery, the vast throngs at the East Lake Golf Club in Atlanta were celebrating the 42-year-old Woods' 80th Tour victory, his first in five years. How far he had come in such a short time was astounding.

"Probably the low point was not knowing if I'd ever be able to live pain-free again," Woods said after his victory. "Am I going to be able to sit, stand, walk, lay down without feeling the pain that I was in? I just didn't want to live that way."

Yes, Woods overcame a lot to win again on the Tour. But Ben Hogan nearly died.

In February 1949, while driving with his wife Valerie in rural West Texas on a foggy patch of road, Hogan's car collided head-on with a Greyhound bus. He threw himself in front of his wife to protect her, an act of heroism that also saved his own life. The steering column was driven through the back of his seat. Hogan broke his pelvis, ankle, collar bone and chipped his ribs. While in the hospital he also developed blood clots that required delicate surgery. Like Woods, Hogan doubted that he would ever be a Tour player again.

"It's going to be a long haul," Hogan told reporters back in '49, "and in my mind, I don't think that I'll ever get back the playing edge I had last year. You work for perfection all your life, and then something like this happens. My nervous system has been shot by this, and I don't see how I can readjust it to competitive golf. But you can bet I'll be back there swinging."

Yet, like Woods—famous for a strong work ethic and dedication to the game—Hogan returned to the Tour. It was February 1950, he was 38, and he lost in a playoff to Sam Snead. Then, in June, he won the U.S. Open at Merion. He would win six of his nine majors after the accident that nearly killed him.

It can be argued that Jack Nicklaus and Woods are 1 and 1A among golf's all-time greats. So, too, it can be argued that Hogan and Woods are 1 and 1A when it comes to the all-time comebacks from injury—and they deserved to be linked in the game's lore because of it.

—Jeff Williams



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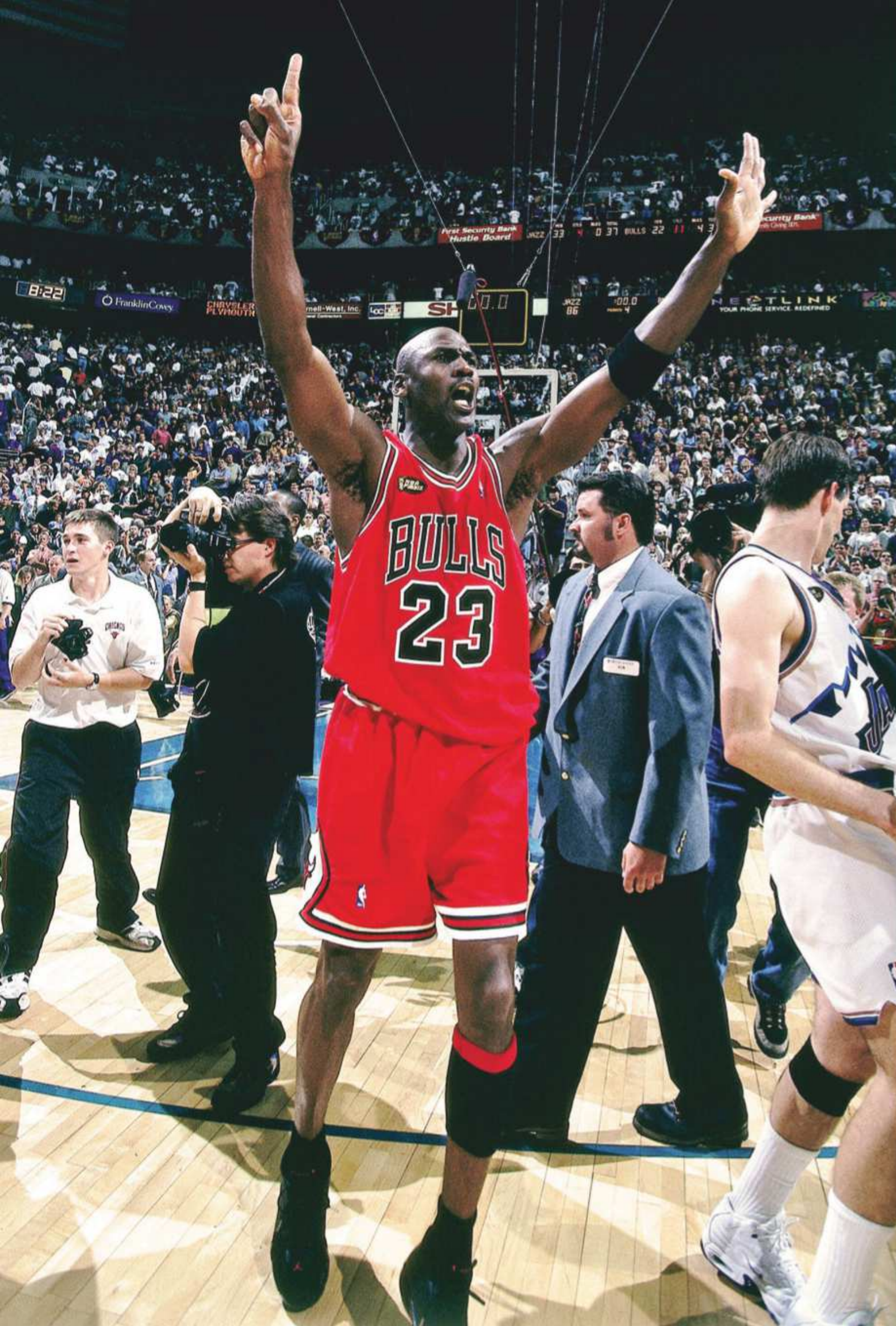
GOING OUT WITH A BANG

SOME PRO ATHLETES
QUIETLY LEAVE THE GAME
WHILE OTHERS EXIT
IN BRILLIANT FASHION

NBA legend Michael Jordan leaps into the air after his Chicago Bulls beat the Utah Jazz in the 1998 NBA Finals. It was his third straight championship and the sixth title of his illustrious career.

WE RANK THE TOP 10
EXITS IN PRO SPORTS

BY KENNETH SHOULER



Michael Jordan walked proudly off the court and into retirement from the Chicago Bulls in 1998. He sank the game-winning shot from 18 feet away in the closing seconds, giving him his sixth NBA title.

When an athlete's career is built of awe-inspiring moments, beginning, middle and end, then it reads like an essay—balanced and complete. Such was the career of one Derek Jeter, who played in his last game at Yankee Stadium on September 25, 2014.

With Antoan Richardson on second and one out in the ninth, Jeter leaned over the plate in his familiar stance. Baltimore righty Evan Meek delivered a thigh-high heater on the outer edge,

where his objective met Jeter's intention. Jeter drilled it between first and second. Nick Markakis' throw home was too late to nab Richardson. The Yankees won Jeter's last-ever home game, 6-5. How many will remember the number 3,465, Jeter's exact number of hits? How few will forget his last at bat at Yankee Stadium?

Moments. None of us gets a second chance to make a first impression. But in sports that works: for on playing fields, it's often the last impression that counts. From Babe Ruth to Ted Williams, from Bill Russell to Michael Jordan, from Rocky Marciano to Pete Sampras, from Roberto Clemente to Derek Jeter—athletes have staged fantastic finishes, accomplishing grand exits that are tucked away indelibly in the files of our brains. Which are the best moments? It's hard to rank them, since we must not only choose the greatest players, but size up the importance of their final games.

»»1 Michael Jordan

Some players begin retirement boasting one fabulous finish. Jordan entered two retirements, five years apart, with two fabulous finishes. (His comeback with the Washington Wizards, beginning in 2001, didn't result in a playoff appearance. He retired for good in 2003.) In 1993, the Chicago Bulls sought to cement their legacy with a third straight title. Against the Phoenix Suns and their most valuable player Charles Barkley, Chicago had only 12 fourth-quarter points in game six: Jordan scored the first nine before John Paxson drained a game-winning three-pointer with 3.9 seconds remaining in the game. Jordan—grieving over the murder of his father, James—announced that he was retiring from the game in October. He was off to play baseball with the Chicago White Sox's minor-league affiliate.

After playing on grass, Jordan returned to basketball in March 1995. He led his Bulls to championship seasons in 1996 and 1997, and entered the 1998 NBA Finals

seeking a third straight. The last 59.2 seconds against Utah comprised his magnum opus: he hit two free throws and followed a John Stockton three with a layup before double-teaming and swiping the ball from Karl Malone. He let seconds tick away before driving hard right on Byron Russell, stepping back and hitting an 18-footer to give the Bulls an 87-86 win. Shooting arm extended, he held the pose. His 45 points led Chicago to its second three-peat of the 1990s.



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»»» 2 John Elway

Denver Broncos quarterback John Elway had heard it before. He couldn't win the big game. In Super Bowl XXIV he was 2 and 0—as in two interceptions and no touchdowns—in a 55-10 loss to San Francisco, landing him galaxies away from the 49ers' Joe Montana. Sure, he had “The Drive” against Cleveland, when he took his team 98 yards in the final 5:43. “Everything is reaction,” Elway shrugged when asked about his uncanny escape-artist mobility and unsurpassed arm strength. In comeback situations, even opposing coaches admitted that their defenders were fearful and back on their heels against Elway. But in January 1998, he was still a 37-year-old playing in his 16th season without a Super Bowl victory.

Elway's fanatical resolve to grab Super Bowl XXXII was never as clear as it was on the “helicopter play.” Late in the third quarter with the game tied at 17, he darted right and dove. Nailed in mid-flight and sent twirling, he still made the first down deep in Green Bay territory. Two runs later by Terrell Davis and Denver held a 24-17 lead. Undeterred, Brett Favre and the Packers marched downfield to tie the game in the fourth quarter. With less than two minutes left, Davis scored again to give Denver a 31-24 victory. That title was Elway's penultimate moment.

His last hurrah superseded the first championship. Following a stellar 14-2 season, Denver navigated its way back to Super Bowl XXXIII, this time against the Atlanta Falcons, also 14-2. Heavily favored, Denver built a three-touchdown lead late in the fourth quarter. Their last touchdown came, fittingly, on Elway's three-yard quarterback draw. The man who passed for more than 50,000 yards, and averaged 4.4 yards when he carried the ball, ended it on a running play. Elway's aerials netted 336 yards and Davis ran for 102. Playing in his last game, Elway won the Most Valuable Player award. No great player's finale in Super Bowl history comes close.



John Elway, top, celebrates after winning his second consecutive Super Bowl title in what would be his final NFL game. In his last game, Bill Russell, above left, defeated rival Wilt Chamberlain for his 11th NBA title.

»»» 3 Bill Russell

The duo of Sam Jones and Bill Russell were 35, but sought to pull it together one last time in 1969. “One thing we've always had on the Celtics is mutual respect,” said player-coach Russell, when asked about the chances of his Boston team making another title run. “And we think that is the most necessary ingredient for a winning combination.” No smack-talking from Russell some 50 years ago—just a succinct, confident prediction. Boston finished fourth with a 48-34 record. No team in the 23-year history of the league had finished that low and won a title. But Russell served notice in the first playoff game against the Philadelphia 76ers, blocking 12 shots. After dispatching the Sixers and the upstart New York Knicks in the next round, Boston dueled the Los Angeles Lakers for the title for the sixth time in eight years.

The Celtics fell behind 2-0, then 3-2, before taking game six at home. When a reporter asked about the chances of winning a seventh contest on an opponent's hardwood, Russell said, “We've done it before,” and smiled. Before the game, he got hold of a flier detailing the Lakers' plans for a post-game victory celebration, which included dropping 10,000 balloons from the rafters at the Los Angeles Forum and piping “Happy Days are Here Again” through the arena. “This cannot happen,” Russell told his teammates, flier in hand. “Tonight, we are going to find out how good they are at track and field. We are going to fast-break.”

With Russell sweeping the boards and releasing outlet passes, Boston bolted to a 91-76 lead after three quarters. Russell scored only six points, but contributed rebound after rebound to Boston's patented break. Jerry West single-handedly kept the Lakers in it, netting 42 points, and bringing them within a point of catching Boston. But on several straight possessions West was double-teamed, and no teammate could hit a shot. Boston held on for a 108-106 victory.

“Bill, this must have been a great win for you,” said broadcaster Jack Twyman in a postgame interview. Overcome with emotion, Russell couldn't speak. “I know it's hard to say what is in your mind now, Bill,” Twyman followed, cueing Russell for a second start: “This has been such a great bunch of guys, and it's been so fabulous the way they played for me,” said Russell. It was also Jones' last game. He was second to Russell, and finished with 24 points.

As ever, the subtext was the Wilt Chamberlain-Russell plot. Amidst the Lakers' comeback, Chamberlain twisted his knee on a rebound, and posted 18 points. No matter. The Celtics won.

Russell had played his final basketball game. That victory gave him his 11th title in 13 years.



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»»» 4 Pete Sampras

Tennis players usually don't last. If one plays well into his early 30s, it's a rarity. Observers murmured that Pete Sampras was old, slow and a bit softer due to his marriage to actress Bridgette Wilson. But Sampras, already a winner of 13 majors, didn't get that memo. Nothing in Sampras' recent performances hinted at a late-career charge in 2002. In the two previous U.S. Opens he had lost to Marat Safin and Lleyton Hewitt—not exactly Roger Federer and Björn Borg. More to the point, he had lost to George Bastl, ranked 145, just two months before the U.S. Open.

Seeded 17, Sampras showed little court rust in disposing of Germany's Tommy Haas and rising American Andy Roddick. In the semifinals he knocked off the Netherlands' Sjeng Schalken in straight sets. But there was no time off between the Saturday semi and the Sunday final. But his Finals opponent, Andre Agassi, then 32, had played a tougher four-set match on Saturday against Lleyton Hewitt. Now Sampras would face the same man, in the same tournament, against whom he'd won his first Grand Slam title in 1990 as a lean 19-year-old.

In the end, Sampras used his familiar serve-and-volley and aggressive get-to-the-net approach to top Agassi 6-3, 6-4, 5-7 and 6-4 to win his 14th and final major title. "I had the last word," said Sampras. "I felt vindicated, like I had just shoved it up everyone's ass." Agassi was exceedingly generous in defeat: "Pete was overall a better player than me on the biggest occasions." Sampras didn't compete in another professional tournament, but waited until after Wimbledon in 2003 to announce his retirement, lest the urge to return came back. Asked if he regretted retiring, Sampras was direct. "No regrets, no," he said. "It wasn't because I couldn't play anymore. It was because emotionally I was done. It wasn't the plan—to win a major and end it. It just sort of happened that way. To look back on it, it's a cool way to go out. To win your last one."

»»» 5 Ted Williams

Ted Williams stood one last time with a bat in his hands. George Patton with a pistol, Winston Churchill with a cigar—those images are no more fitting than Williams with a bat. It was the bottom of the eighth inning at Fenway Park on September 28, 1960. It was not a World Series game; the Boston Red Sox didn't reach a Series from



Despite the naysayers, Pete Sampras, top left, captured the U.S. Open title in his last professional tournament. Baseball legend Ted Williams, top right, smacked a 420-foot home run in his last at bat. In his final match, Rocky Marciano, above in white trunks, knocked out Archie Moore in a bout that took place inside the confines of Yankee Stadium.

1947 through 1966. Just 10,454 fans attended the game to watch their seventh-place team. No matter. Williams had told the Sox that he would not play the last three games scheduled in New York.

Often touted as the greatest hitter who ever drew breath, he was "The Splendid Splinter," a hitting savant who would later write *The Science of Hitting* in which he divided the shoulders-to-knees strike zone into a grid of 77 boxes. He had calculated, for instance, that a belt-high offering on the outside corner was a .380 hot zone, while one low and outside was a .230 sucker's pitch.

Now he stood in. Now Baltimore's Jack Fisher threw one by Williams. He peered out and something in the kid's cocky demeanor hinted that he would get another fastball. He did. Williams drove it into the bullpen in right-center, about 420 feet away. Williams circled the bases "like a feather in a vortex," wrote novelist John Updike. He toed home and disappeared into the dugout. He had had his battles with the Boston fans and press and would not come out to tip his cap. "Gods do not answer letters," Updike explained in his essay "Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu."



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6 Rocky Marciano

It was September 21, 1955, at Yankee Stadium, and boxing’s heavy-weight championship of the world was at stake between challenger Archie Moore and Rocky Marciano. The fight had been scheduled to take place the night before, but the threat of Hurricane Ione postponed the bout. Now, thunder in the form of applause rained down on Marciano when he was introduced.

Why not? The native of Brockton, Massachusetts, was entering his 49th fight. The man whose real name was Rocco Francis Marchegiano had already knocked out 42 of his 48 opponents and was the only undefeated heavyweight champion (no losses or draws). How was it that this smallish 5-foot, 11-inch fighter, who usually fought under 190 pounds, always landed with such heavy blows?

Opponents had been wondering about it for years. Even Moore, who would go on to end his long career with an eye-popping 131 knockouts, got his fill of Marciano’s blows. “Moore is not worrying

about being in the corner, but it’s still not a good place for him,” said commentator Bill Corum in round six, his tone ominous. Seconds later, Marciano felled Moore with a chopping right cross to the temple. Moore rose at the count of six. Marciano’s punches kept coming and he floored Moore again. Both fighters seemed exhausted as round eight began. Moore’s right eye was nearly swollen shut, and he was saved by the bell in the eighth. Finally, Marciano landed two thundering left hooks and knocked out his opponent at 1:19 of the ninth round. “I did the best I could,” Moore said. “But Rocky’s a great puncher.”

Few doubted that Marciano would fight a 50th bout. But he announced his retirement seven months later, at the age of 32. “I didn’t get hurt physically while fighting,” Marciano said. “My physical condition has nothing to do with it. My lonesome family convinced me that I should quit while I’m still in shape.” Nearly 60 years after his last fight, he remains the only undefeated heavyweight.



Legendary New York Yankees slugger Babe Ruth was traded to the Boston Braves at the age of 40. In one of his final games, he slammed three home runs, the last of which sailed out of Forbes Field.

7 Babe Ruth

It is unsurprising that “The Sultan of Swat” would land on a list such as this. It is surprising that he would land as low as seventh. The Yankees had done the unthinkable: they traded the 40-year-old right fielder to the Boston Braves, who viewed Ruth as a gate attraction, even though Braves’ owner Judge Emil Fuchs promised Ruth a shot at managing in 1936. Ruth soon chafed upon learning that Fuchs had no intention of honoring either the promises of his being a manager or working in the front office.

A declining part-time player, with an average hovering around .150, Ruth asked Fuchs in May to grant him an early retirement. Fuchs persuaded Ruth to stay until Memorial Day, when Boston was playing a double-header.

On May 25, 1935, Ruth gave one last demonstration of the thunder in his bat. Playing against the Pirates at Forbes Field, Ruth logged four hits in four at bats, including three home runs, the 712th, 713th and 714th of his titanic career. The last two blasts came off Guy Bush—the onetime Chicago Cub who Ruth and the Yankees had rocked for nine runs in five innings in a 1932 World Series sweep. The ball sailed clear over the right field grandstand, bounding into the street and rolling to a stop at nearby Schenley Park—the first ball ever hit out of Forbes Field since the park had opened in 1909. The Pirates prevailed 11-7 over the dismal Braves, who would go on to finish with a 38-115 record, one of the worst winning percentages (.248) in history.

Friends suggested that Ruth quit after he hit those final home runs. But he had given his word to Fuchs to remain through the holiday. He retired on June 2, 1935.

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»»» 8 Roberto Clemente

On September 30, 1972, Roberto Clemente cocked his bat against New York Mets' left-hander Jon Matlack. He sized up an off-speed pitch, uncoiled from his crouch and lashed a ringing double into the gap in left-centerfield. The scoreboard at Three Rivers Stadium read: "Roberto is now one of 11 players in major league history to get 3,000 or more hits." It would be his last regular season hit. Three months and a day later he would be dead, as the DC-7 cargo plane he was taking to deliver relief supplies to earthquake victims in Managua, Nicaragua, went down off the coast of Puerto Rico and was lost at sea.

Truth be told, Clemente had established his own baseball immortality (for anyone who still doubted it) a year before, in the 1971 World Series. In that affair, Clemente, 37, was a one-man tour de force, raking 12 hits, hitting .414 and belting a home run to give the Pirates the lead in game seven of the World Series against Baltimore. Baltimore had led the Series 2-0. In 1972, he was hurt for much of the season and missed 60 games, hitting "only" .312, his lowest mark since 1968.

After his 3,000th hit, Clemente found himself playing three days later, entering as a defensive replacement in the ninth for Gene Clines in right field. But he did not bat in that game. He also played in a losing playoff series against Cincinnati.

A special election of the Baseball Writers' Association of America was held in March 1973, less than three months after Clemente's death. He earned 393 of a possible 424 votes. With 93 percent of the vote in his favor, he was inducted into baseball's Hall of Fame. His body was never found.

»»» 9 Bob Cousy

He was the first of the great Celtics. Cousy made his way to Boston by way of the College of the Holy Cross and was the third pick overall in the 1950 draft, when an outfit known as the Tri-Cities Blackhawks snapped him up. Boston coach Red Auerbach drafted first, but passed up on Cousy in favor of center Charlie Share. His reply to New England fans who wanted Cousy? "I'm supposed to win, not go after local yokels." Luckily for Boston, Cousy wanted \$10,000, \$4,000 more than was being offered by Tri-Cities. He didn't report to camp. He was snapped up by the Chicago Stags, who then folded. Cousy and two other players went into a dispersal draft. Three owners drew lots and Boston owner Walter Brown picked Cousy and signed him for \$9,000. Scouts were skeptical. One said, "The first time he tries that fancy Dan [dribbling and passing] stuff in this league, they'll cram the ball down his throat."

Red and the others would soon eat their words. In the mythic lore surrounding Boston drafts and trades, Cousy was one of the greatest tales. He was the NBA's first great point guard. How great? Using his blind passes and behind-the-back maneuvers, he led the league in assists eight years in a row, from 1953 through 1960, while posting 18 to 21 points per game. Moreover, the "Houdini of the Hardwood" invented the Celtics' running game and made the fast break synonymous with Boston basketball. Despite the diminutive guard's dazzle, the Celtics, in the rueful words of Auerbach, "couldn't get the ball." They lacked an inside game. Signing center



Pittsburgh Pirates great Roberto Clemente, top, tragically died in a plane crash three months after getting his 3,000th hit. In his final game, Bob Cousy, above, scored 18 points en route to his fifth consecutive title.

Bill Russell for the 1956–57 season brought a title right off. From 1959 through 1966 the Celtics won eight in a row.

In his 13th season, Cousy played his grand finale on April 24, 1963, scoring 18 points to beat the Lakers as Boston won its fifth title in a row, 112-109 before 15,652 fans in Los Angeles. At a retirement ceremony a month earlier, Cousy broke down twice while addressing the fans at Boston Garden. With his wife and two daughters at his side, he spoke of the camaraderie he would miss. A standing ovation showered down on him.

Looking back on his Boston years he recalled, "Red's position was always 'You want to pass a little differently? That's fine as long as it works.'"



»» 10 Jerome Bettis / Michael Strahan

“Just get me to Detroit,” Pittsburgh Steelers running back Jerome Bettis told his teammates during the playoff run in 2005. Detroit was the site of Super Bowl XL. Bettis, now in his last season, had never played in one. Michael Strahan, prior to his last game on February 3, 2008, had played in one Super Bowl as a member of the New York Giants. But it’s one he’d like to forget, as the Giants lost to the Baltimore Ravens 34-7 in Super Bowl XXXV in 2001.

Both men enjoyed fine careers. Bettis, known as “The Bus,” because of his ability to carry defenders along who were trying to tackle him, ranks seventh in all-time rushing with 13,662 yards. Strahan owns the record for sacks in a season, but the record-breaking sack was recorded when Green Bay quarterback Brett Favre went into a dive and Strahan fell on top of him. More to the point, both won their first Super Bowl on the last days of their careers.

Bettis’ title game came first in Super Bowl XL in 2006. The Steelers beat the Seattle Seahawks 21-10 as Bettis ran for 43 yards on 14 carries. The build-up had been more memorable, as Bettis became the rallying cry for the Steelers. Finishing his 13th season, the last 10 with Pittsburgh, Bettis had been a Steeler workhorse, a 5-foot, 11-inch, 252-pound side of beef who had rushed for 1,000-plus yards for six consecutive seasons and who would have fit well with the Steeler’s dynasty of a generation before.



Michael Strahan, left, contributed two tackles and a sack in his final game, a Super Bowl victory, with the New York Giants. The superb play of running back Jerome Bettis in his 13th and final season was a rallying cry for the Pittsburgh Steelers as they went on to win Super Bowl XL.

Two years later, Strahan was playing in Super Bowl XLII, the last contest in his 15-year career. He contributed two tackles and a sack, but with under a minute left the outcome was very much in doubt. Not until Eli Manning connected with Plaxico Burress for a 13-yard touchdown pass with 35 ticks left did the Giants take a 17-14 lead. New England’s Tom Brady missed on two long passes to Randy Moss and the Giants had their third Super Bowl.

HONORABLE MENTIONS Several other players deserve honorable mentions. One of the great middle-linebackers of all-time, Ray Lewis ended his storied career with the Baltimore Ravens with his second world championship. Lewis’ contribution in his last go around was stellar: he led the NFL with 51 tackles in the postseason. His finale was a 34-31 victory over San Francisco in Super Bowl XLVII.

In the last at bat of his legendary career, in game six of the World Series against the New York Giants on October 10, 1951, Joe DiMaggio rapped a double in the bottom of the eighth inning. The Yankees held on for a 4-3 victory and their third consecutive Series triumph. It was the ninth championship team DiMaggio played on in his 13-year career, second only to Yogi Berra’s 10.

Joe Montana exited in style, too. As a Kansas City Chief, Montana connected on 26 of 37 passes for 314 yards in his last game, a 27-17 loss against Miami in the wild card playoff game on December 31, 1994.

Before turning over the coaching reigns to Bill Russell, Red Auerbach coached his last game, a game seven NBA Final against the Lakers, on April 28, 1966. Boston won 95-93, giving Red his eighth consecutive title and ninth overall in his stellar 20-year career.

In sports, the next memorable finish will likely come sooner than we expect. ♦

Kenneth A. Shouler, a frequent contributor to CIGAR AFICIONADO, is an associate professor of philosophy at the County College of Morris in Randolph, NJ.

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Holiday Drinks Run **Hot** & **Cold**

A warm and rich Tom and Jerry (left) and the cool and potent French 75 (right) are ideal holiday sippers.

When toasting in a winter wonderland, the choices range from warming cups to elegant cheer

BY JACK BETTRIDGE • PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF HARRIS

“I was just thinking of a flaming rum punch,”

muses Clarence, the simple angel of the holiday film classic *It's a Wonderful Life*. Even though it's a snowy Christmas Eve and he hasn't had a drink for 200 years, Clarence defers to winter-drinking protocol, deciding it's not nearly cold enough for that bit of liquid pyrotechnics. Instead the angel orders mulled wine. Unfortunately, he has materialized in a 1940s shot-and-a-beer joint where they serve hard drinks for men who want to get drunk fast, and Clarence gets bounced.

Back in his day of wassails and steaming Dickensian punch bowls, cold-weather imbibing was dictated by temperature and calendar. (Not to mention the type of bar one was visiting, as poor Clarence discovered.) Today, we strike a sublime balance between the two outlooks. While a December Piña Colada might prompt odd looks, no one will pull out a thermometer to check that it's cold enough for your Eggnog or grouse if you just want an all-purpose Highball. Furthermore, along with the hearty, savory drinks traditional to the holidays, plenty of cleaner, colder cocktails still manage to say “Seasons Greetings”...and will allow Clarence to keep his seat at the bar.

Eggnog

This sublime mixture of eggs, milk, sugar and the brown spirit of your choice comes to us from the English punch tradition, but it reached prominence in the Colonies due to a ready supply of its ingredients on farms. The many theories behind the origin of the term “nog” almost rival the recipe variations. Proponents will argue the best type of spirit, whether to use milk or cream, keep or discard egg whites, flip or shake the mixture and more. And if you're thinking the standard Eggnog isn't potent, consider this: cadets smuggled gallons of whiskey into West Point at Christmas in 1826 to spike what was supposed to be a virgin version of the holiday quaff. The resulting reveling—now called the Eggnog Riot—resulted in some 20 court martials. Implicated were Jefferson Davis as well as two future Confederate

generals. Our recipe (turn to page 135) shouldn't get you in such trouble—but we've substituted dark rum in the place of whiskey, just in case.

Tom and Jerry

Tom and Jerry, Eggnog's more complicated, but warm-hearted cousin, has been around almost two centuries. Back in 1932, the Damon Runyon piece “Dancing Dan's Christmas” suggested that the holiday may have been invented as an excuse to drink this very cocktail. The picaresque characters in the short story manage to down more than a few before marching off to play Santa Claus for a destitute grandmother's last Christmas. While the drink waned in popularity (except in Wisconsin and Minnesota) during Prohibition because of its involved preparation, today's creative bartenders are looking to this venerable cocktail to bring smiles during the cold months of winter. The Tom and Jerry is almost a meal in a cup, perfect to keep you warm on a bitter night.

Champagne Cocktail

When the holiday season concludes with New Year's Eve, Champagne toasts are inevitably the order of the evening. If you're on a budget or have no access to housed-aged bubbly (see the Good Life Guide), it's not a sin to make something more interesting out of a lesser Champagne—or even sparkling wine. For this time-honored solution, sugar and bitters provide a welcome and well-balanced oomph. Cutting the lemon peel garnish into a long, sinuous spiral (a la the Horse's

Neck cocktail) makes this drink's appearance all the more festive. You can swap in an orange peel if you wish to be more seasonal, but resist the urge to quote Frank Pentangeli in the classic film *The Godfather Part II* when you're serving this to a friend.

Cognac French 75

Those who know their classic cocktails may be thinking we've made a mistake. Yes, the French 75 is commonly formulated with gin, not Cognac. While the gin version is a great drink, too, this is a winter cocktail story and for that you need substance. (Imagine being stranded in the snowy Alps and a St. Bernard brings you gin!) Besides, plenty of evidence shows that this drink has long been made with brandy. One of the earliest written recipes, dating back to 1922, includes Calvados (apple brandy) in the mix. In New Orleans, Cognac versions are popular, for obvious reasons. What is undisputed is that the drink was invented in World War I and named for an advanced piece of artillery known for shelling with speed and precision. Drink too many and you'll see why.

Hot Toddy

More than simply a cold weather drink, the Hot Toddy has long been touted as a remedy for the common cold. Science might not support it as a cure, but the ingredients will certainly treat the symptoms. The honey soothes the throat, the spice and lemon open the sinuses and the liquor, well, you know what the liquor does. When the Wild Turkey distiller Jimmy Russell introduced his American Honey liqueur (essentially a Toddy in a bottle), he said, “It's good for a cough. So I always try to have a cough.” Like Jimmy, we like it with Bourbon, but feel free to substitute your favorite spirit.

(See page 135 for recipes)




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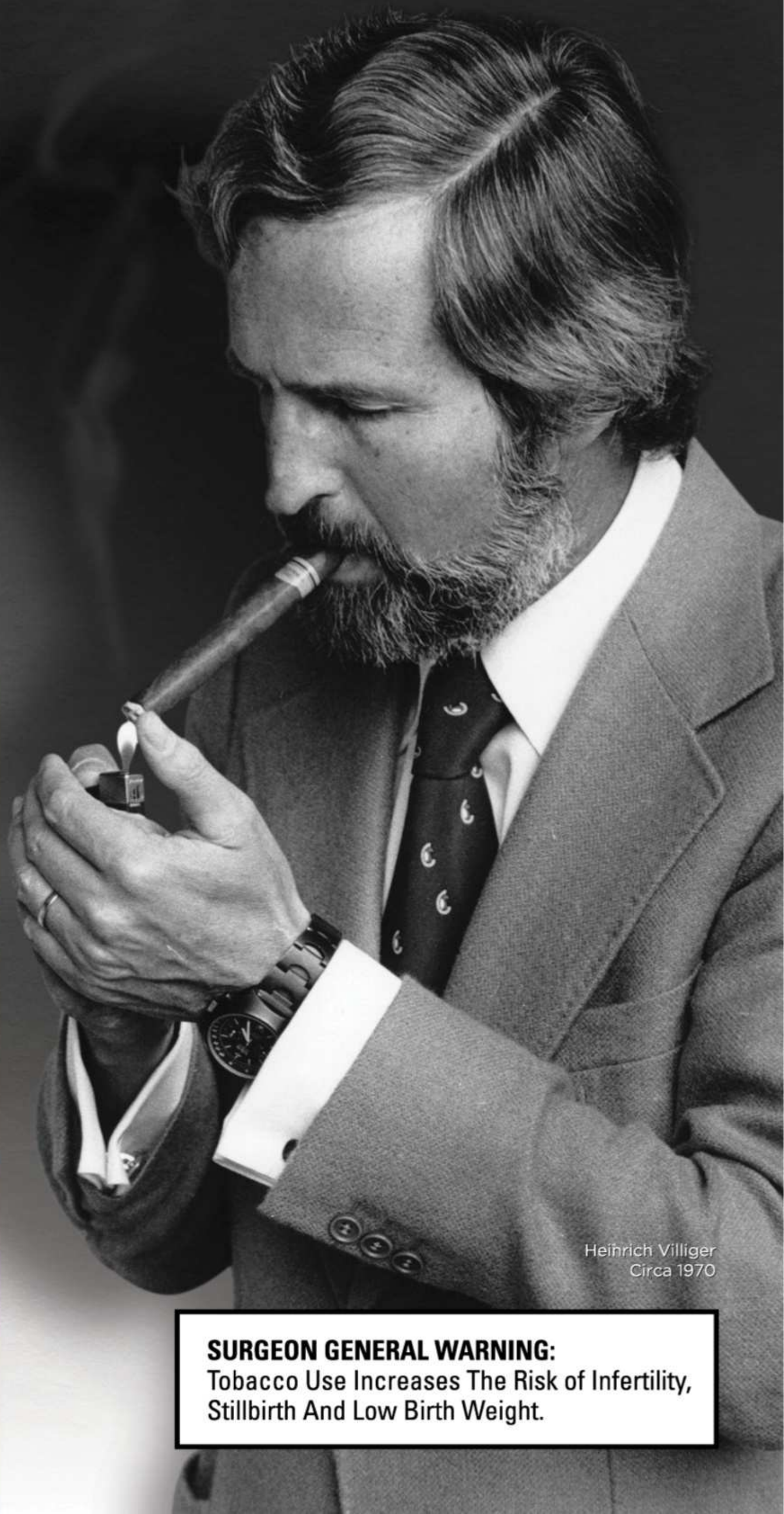
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Hot Toddy

Hot (not boiling) water
2 oz. Bourbon
1 tsp. honey
Lemon wedge
Cinnamon stick
Pinch of nutmeg

Pour Bourbon in a mug. Fill with hot water. Add garnishes. Sip by a roaring fire and watch your spirits improve.

Cognac French 75

2 oz. Cognac
½ oz. lemon juice
½ oz. simple syrup
Champagne

Shake brandy, lemon juice and simple syrup over ice and strain into a Collins glass. Fill with Champagne.



Eggnog

1 egg
6 oz. whole milk
2 oz. dark rum
1 tsp. sugar
Vanilla or grated nutmeg as garnish

Give the mixture a good long shake in a mixing cup with ice. Strain into a highball glass. Garnish. To make this into a crowd-friendly punch, multiply ingredients by number of servings desired. May be made in advance and briefly refrigerated.

Tom and Jerry

Serves 8–10 people

8 eggs
2 cups sugar
1 tsp. allspice
1 tsp. ground nutmeg
1 tsp. ground cloves
1 tsp. cinnamon
3 tbsp. vanilla extract
Hot water
Hot milk
Rum
Brandy

Separate egg whites from yolks. Whip yolks separately with spices. Beat egg whites to a stiff froth. Fold whites into yolks, making a batter. (Refrigerate if preparing ahead of serving on the same day.) Use water to warm cups and then discard. Half fill cups with batter. Add 1 oz. rum and 1 oz. brandy and fill with hot milk (hot water can be substituted). Stir vigorously until smooth. Garnish with nutmeg.



Champagne Cocktail

Champagne
Sugar cube
Bitters (Angostura is the classic choice)
Lemon peel, cut into spiral if desired

Place sugar cube in the bottom of a Champagne flute. Dribble on a few drops of bitters. Allow to soak through. Fill glass with Champagne. Add the lemon peel; if cut into spiral allow it to hang by the rim. ❖

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141

BLIND TASTING

We blind-smoked 81 cigars from all over the world. While some were outstanding, one in particular scored a whopping 95 points, making it an instant classic.

164

BUYING GUIDE

A quick cheat-sheet to our tasting section that highlights the top scores, best bargains and strongest cigars.

166

CONNOISSEUR'S CORNER

The Romeo y Julieta Dunhill Sun-Grown Brevas spent nearly 60 years wrapped in foil and stowed in a slide-lid cabinet. Find out what six decades has done to this tobacco. Plus, a slim Montecristo from the late '80s still has plenty to say.

169

DOMINICAN CIGARS TO BUY NOW

Some of the world's greatest handmade cigars come from the Dominican Republic. We show you which ones you should be smoking right now.

171

CUBA'S FINEST FIELDS

Only five small farms in Cuba produce the best tobacco. Senior contributing editor Gordon Mott visits each one.

For much more on cigars, see our cigar-lover's guide to the Dominican Republic, beginning on page 70.



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Three cigars—each from a different country, each representing different blending styles—scored 91 points to lead this category. La Aurora is proudly the oldest cigar factory in the Dominican Republic, and its 1903 Cameroon blend has tobacco from four countries. The Nicaraguan Nat Cicco Aniversario 1965 Liga No. 4 was created to commemorate the company's first brand back in 1965, which was quite a different smoke, a factory reject, value cigar. The Punch Sir David, another commemorative smoke, honors the late David Tang, bon vivant and founder of Pacific Cigar Co. Ltd., which distributes Cuban cigars throughout the Asia Pacific region. It had its market debut in August.



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 47 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

LA AURORA 1903 CAMEROON CHURCHILL

A cedary, earthy Churchill with notes of coffee and fresh tobacco that lead to a tea-and-lemon finish. An interesting smoke.

U.S.: \$6.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

91



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

NAT CICCICO ANIVERSARIO 1965 LIGA NO. 4 CHURCHILL

There's a sweet caramel and molasses quality to this otherwise leathery, nutty Churchill, which is box-pressed and pigtailed. The draw and burn are lush and even.

U.S.: \$7.29 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

91



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 49 LENGTH: 7 1/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JULY 2018

PUNCH SIR DAVID EXCLUSIVO HONG KONG

Beautifully made, this Churchill is topped with a three-seam cap. Clear notes of toasted almond, clove and gingersnap are driven by an ever-present oakiness.

U.S.: N/A CHINA: HK\$388 STRENGTH: Medium

91



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 49 LENGTH: 6 3/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

ASHTON ESTATE SUN GROWN 20-YEAR SALUTE

This good-looking Churchill has a lush draw and even burn. Its smoke shows notes of cinnamon and almond complemented by touches of baked apple and cloves.

U.S.: \$20.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

90



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 6 3/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ILLUSIONE HAUT 10 CHURCHILL

A long cigar that burns evenly, showing notes of cedar, graham cracker and baking spices. The finish calls to mind fresh tobacco.

U.S.: \$17.95 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

90



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

OLIVA SERIE V CHURCHILL EXTRA

The draw of this richly colored Churchill is notably firm, but leaves sweet impressions of honey, mesquite and BBQ sauce before the nutty, leathery finish.

U.S.: \$10.92 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

SERINO ROYALE CONNECTICUT CHURCHILL

Tawny colored and reddish, this eye-catching Churchill starts woody, slowly unfolding notes of leather, vanilla and caraway seed, all leading to a lemon-peel finish.
U.S.: \$10.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

90



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

NAT SHERMAN TIMELESS COLLECTION CHURCHILL

The excellent draw and burn of this long, tawny-looking cigar ushers in notes of butterscotch, nuts and earth around a strong core of hickory wood.
U.S.: \$9.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ARCHETYPE DREAMSTATE CHURCHILL

Earthy and herbal, this tall, blond Churchill hints of black tea and honey. The burn is even, and the draw is quite open and consistent.
U.S.: \$12.78 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

88



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 56 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ESPADA BY MONTECRISTO QUILLON

Large and imposing, this hefty Churchill is covered in a reddish-brown, colorado wrapper. It's a predominantly nutty cigar with notes of leather and earth.
U.S.: \$13.08 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 49 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

ARTURO FUENTE KING "T" (TUBO)

A tan Churchill with a slightly firm draw, but even burn. The smoke is creamy and woody. There are tangy notes of ginger that precede the sweet and nutty finish, which has a hint of brown sugar.
U.S.: \$10.44 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild

87



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PERDOMO HABANO BOURBON BARREL-AGED MADURO CHURCHILL

Near black in appearance, this darkly wrapped Churchill shows hearty notes of coffee, earth and semisweet chocolate, before a sharp, woody finish.
U.S.: \$8.75 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

87



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 6 7/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR, NICARAGUA

JOYA CABINETTA CHURCHILL

A two-toned Churchill that wears both Connecticut and maduro wrappers. First puffs are rather raw and rustic, but the cigar picks up notes of graham cracker and spice.
U.S.: \$8.10 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

85



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: BRAZIL
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

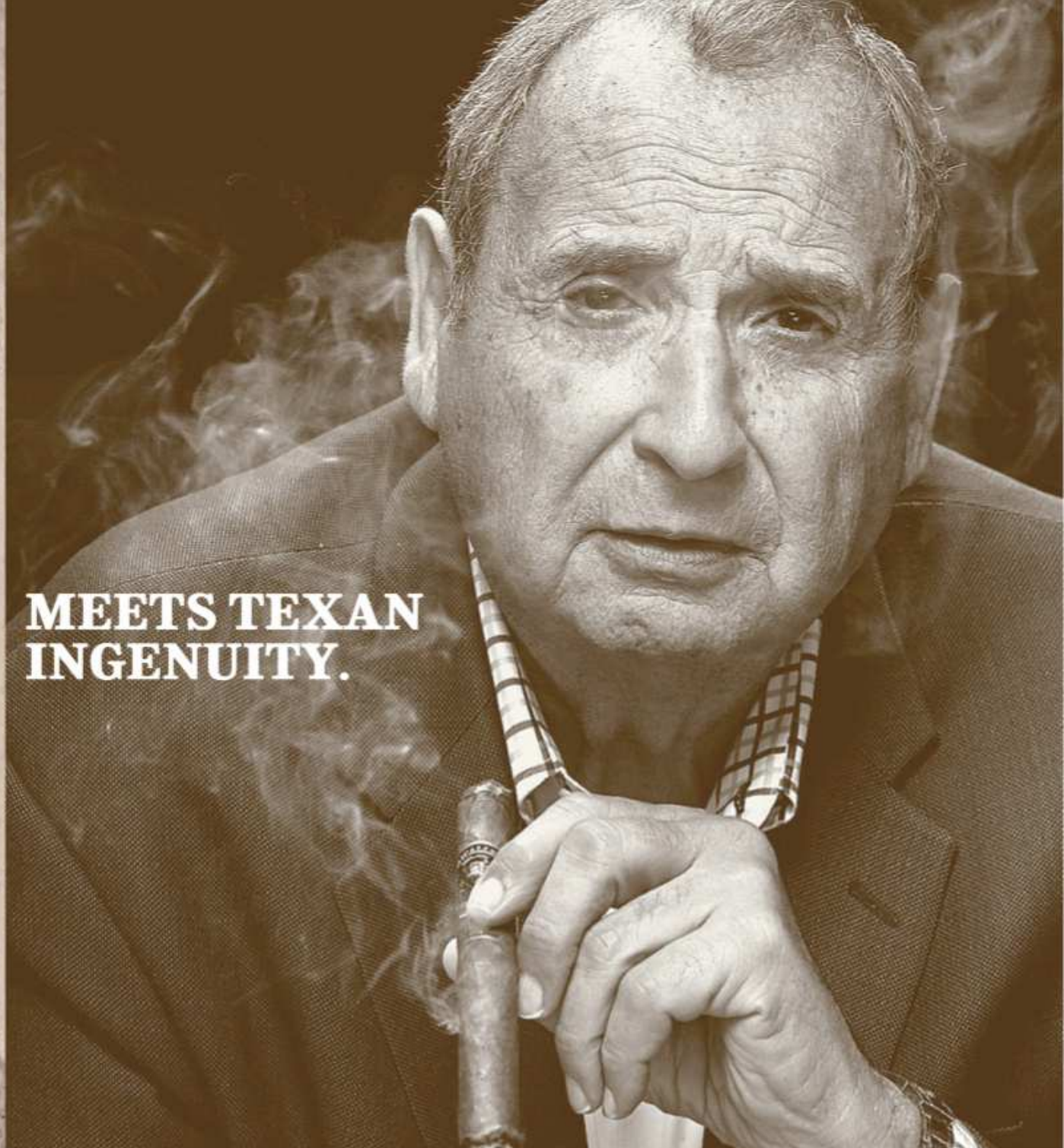
LIGA PRIVADA NO. 9 CORONA DOBLE

The dark wrapper of this Churchill seems to exude oil. Its primary notes of earth, sweet dates and chocolate are offset by a persistent waxiness that sticks to the palate.
U.S.: \$16.81 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

85



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The Casa Cuba Doble Tres from the Fuente family scored 93 points and is emblematic of a different era in cigarmaking—understated, yet full of character without having to be a full-bodied powerhouse. Made in the Dominican Republic, Casa Cuba was created by Carlos Fuente Sr. (who died in 2016) and released in 2013. The size Doble Tres is named after a Cuban domino. La Colmena Amado No. 44 scored 93 points as well and is one of the few Miami-made cigars in this tasting. The medium-bodied brand is part of the Warped portfolio (owned by Kyle Gellis) and rolled at the El Titan de Bronze factory in Miami's Little Havana. Both cigars emphasize balance over strength.



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

CASA CUBA DOBLE TRES

This solidly rolled corona draws beautifully, showing a spicy, woody smoke that elegantly transitions between notes of cloves and citrus to nutmeg and baking spices. The finish is profoundly redolent of rich, dark chocolate.
U.S.: \$9.93 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

93



U.S.A.

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA COLMENA AMADO NO. 44

Rolled with a pigtail cap and uncut foot, this cigar delivers a dense and chewy smoke that takes on the rich qualities of cashews, cedar and German chocolate cake. Balanced and flavorful.
U.S.: \$14.72 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

93



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 43 LENGTH: 5 3/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

GILBERTO OLIVA RESERVA BLANC 5.75X43

A beautifully constructed corona with a superb draw and even combustion. Base notes of cedar and earth are a rich foundation for the cigar's sweeter elements of baking spices and cocoa powder.
U.S.: \$5.75 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

92



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 5/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: AUGUST 2015

MONTECRISTO NO. 3

Though firm at first, the draw of this corona eventually opens up, imparting a smoke that begins dry and hoppy but warms to show nutmeg, clove and orange peel. A chocolate note emerges as well.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £18.21 STRENGTH: Medium

90



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

CAO PILÓN CORONA

A thin corona with an open, even draw. Toasty and nutty, the smoke also leaves a mineral sensation and a rich, chocolate cake finish.
U.S.: \$6.69 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: MAY 2015

COHIBA SIGLO III

An oaky smoke with nutty underpinnings and floral qualities but a notably firm draw affected the score. The wrapper is a perfect shade of medio claro.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £27.48 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA,
PERU
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

**H. UPMANN VINTAGE CAMEROON
CORONA**

The firm draw of this fairly dark, toothy cigar imparts notes of dry cocoa powder, a bit of red-pepper spice and a bold finish of leather and wood.

U.S.: \$5.72 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 38 LENGTH: 5 5/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

HENRY CLAY RUSTIC CHEROOT

Rolled with a flag cap and uncut foot, this rustic-looking cigar burns evenly, bringing notes of chocolate and hickory wood with scattered hints of raisin.

U.S.: \$4.25 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

89



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PADRÓN LONDRES MADURO

Rumpled in appearance with a lopsided cap. Initial notes are spicy and piquant with plenty of earthiness leading to hints of chocolate and a dry, woody finish.

U.S.: \$5.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 1/4"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2017

PARTAGÁS CORONA SENIOR (TUBO)

A toasty and nutty corona with almond notes and a woody finish. The draw and burn are open and even throughout.

U.S.: N/A ITALY: 6.50 EURO STRENGTH: Medium

89



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: APRIL 2016

ROMEO Y JULIETA ROMEO NO. 1 (TUBO)

The draw of this reddish-brown corona is open and substantial without being airy. Nutty notes and spice are at the cigar's core, along with cedar and a touch of grass.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £18.39 STRENGTH: Medium

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: INDONESIA
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

COHIBA CRYSTAL CORONA

Made with an exceptionally round head, this corona delivers a dense, chewy smoke, full of almond notes, citrus and fresh tobacco, all building to a very woody finish.

U.S.: \$18.99 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

88



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

MATILDE RENACER CORONA

Peaty and smoky, this corona also shows an oakiness, notes of black pepper and a charry finish.

U.S.: \$7.99 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA, PERU
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

**MONTECRISTO WHITE
VINTAGE CONNECTICUT NO. 3**

A bit dull in appearance, this corona smokes evenly, exhibiting a vaguely nutty character with a spicy hint of ginger and a finish of bitter hay.

U.S.: \$11.55 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild

85

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corona gordas

The Cuban Hoyo de Monterrey Le Hoyo de San Juan scored 92 points and is a perfect example of Habanos S.A.'s shift towards thicker cigars, as it's one of the thickest Hoyos in the entire line. Cigarmaker A.J. Fernandez has become the industry's go-to guy when large companies want to reblend and reboot their classic Cuban cigar brands for the U.S. market (with non-Cuban tobacco). In the case of the Ramon Allones by AJ Fernandez Toro (92 points), he produces and distributes the cigar, but doesn't own the trademark. The San Cristobal Quintessence is made in Nicaragua by My Father Cigars for Ashton. It scored 92 points with a defining core of leather and black pepper.



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5 7/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: AUGUST 2016

HOYO DE MONTERREY LE HOYO DE SAN JUAN

A plump, well-made smoke with a veiny wrapper. Its primary notes of almonds and wood take on some earthy, mineral qualities before a sweet, fruity finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £27.94 STRENGTH: Medium

92



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

RAMON ALLONES BY AJ FERNANDEZ TORO

Strong notes of cocoa powder, marshmallow and caramel build around this dark cigar's pleasantly nutty core. A sweet and balanced smoke.
U.S.: \$13.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

92



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5 5/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

SAN CRISTOBAL QUINTESSENCE CORONA GORDA

Bold and leathery with spicy notes of black pepper. The strong smoke takes on a gingersnap sweetness fortified by rich underpinnings of chocolate.
U.S.: \$8.25 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

92



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ALEC BRADLEY NICA PURO DIAMOND ROUGH CUT

A box-pressed cigar with an unusual diamond shape. Every puff is leathery and earthy buttressed by touches of baking spices, minerals and white pepper.
U.S.: \$9.13 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

91



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5 5/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: MEXICO

LAS CALAVERAS EDICIÓN LIMITADA 2018 LC46

Enrobed in a dark, oily cover leaf, this finely crafted cigar smokes well, offering notes of cedar, wood and cinnamon balanced by hints of coffee bean and vanilla.
U.S.: \$9.95 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

CASA MAGNA JALAPA CLARO ROBUSTO

The wrapper of this cigar has an oily gleam and healthy complexion. Its sweet, woody palate ranges from hickory and mesquite to maple and oak. The finish is herbal.
U.S.: \$6.90 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

89



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
BINDER: COSTA RICA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA PALINA LP NUMBER 1 ROBUSTO

Wrapped in a veiny cover leaf, this robusto has a lush draw and wavy burn. Notes of almond paste and nougat frame a hearty core of wood.
U.S.: \$9.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 53 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: FEBRUARY 2018

MONTECRISTO LÍNEA 1935 MALTÉS

Floral at first, this reddish cigar picks up intensity to show notes of earth, coffee and wood with a touch of generic sweetness. The burn is even and clean.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £33.50 STRENGTH: Medium

89



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: MEXICO

ROCKY PATEL TAVICUSA ROBUSTO

A rustic-looking cigar that smokes well, delivering hearty impressions of earth and coffee intertwined with hints of licorice. The finish is charry.
U.S.: \$10.30 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

CASA FERNANDEZ AGANORSA LEAF TORO

A box-pressed cigar that starts with prominent notes of nuts and nougat as well as black cherry, but the flavors fall flat on the finish.
U.S.: \$8.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

PARTAGAS LEGEND FABULOSO LEYENDA

Notes of cocoa and earth underscore this cigar's elements of coffee and acidity. It's dark and squarely pressed with a rather firm draw.
U.S.: \$12.49 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

87



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JANUARY 2015

COHIBA MADURO 5 GENIOS

Spotchy and dark, this cigar is rolled with an unevenly colored wrapper. It's yeasty and bready at first with hints of cloves, caramel and tangy citrus, but the smoke turns bitter on the finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £40.35 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

86



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

DAVIDOFF MILLENNIUM BLEND SERIES TORO

Musty first puffs of this dark cigar become sweeter with notes of milk chocolate, coconut and wood, but the finish is a bit tart.
U.S.: \$24.60 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

86



MEXICO

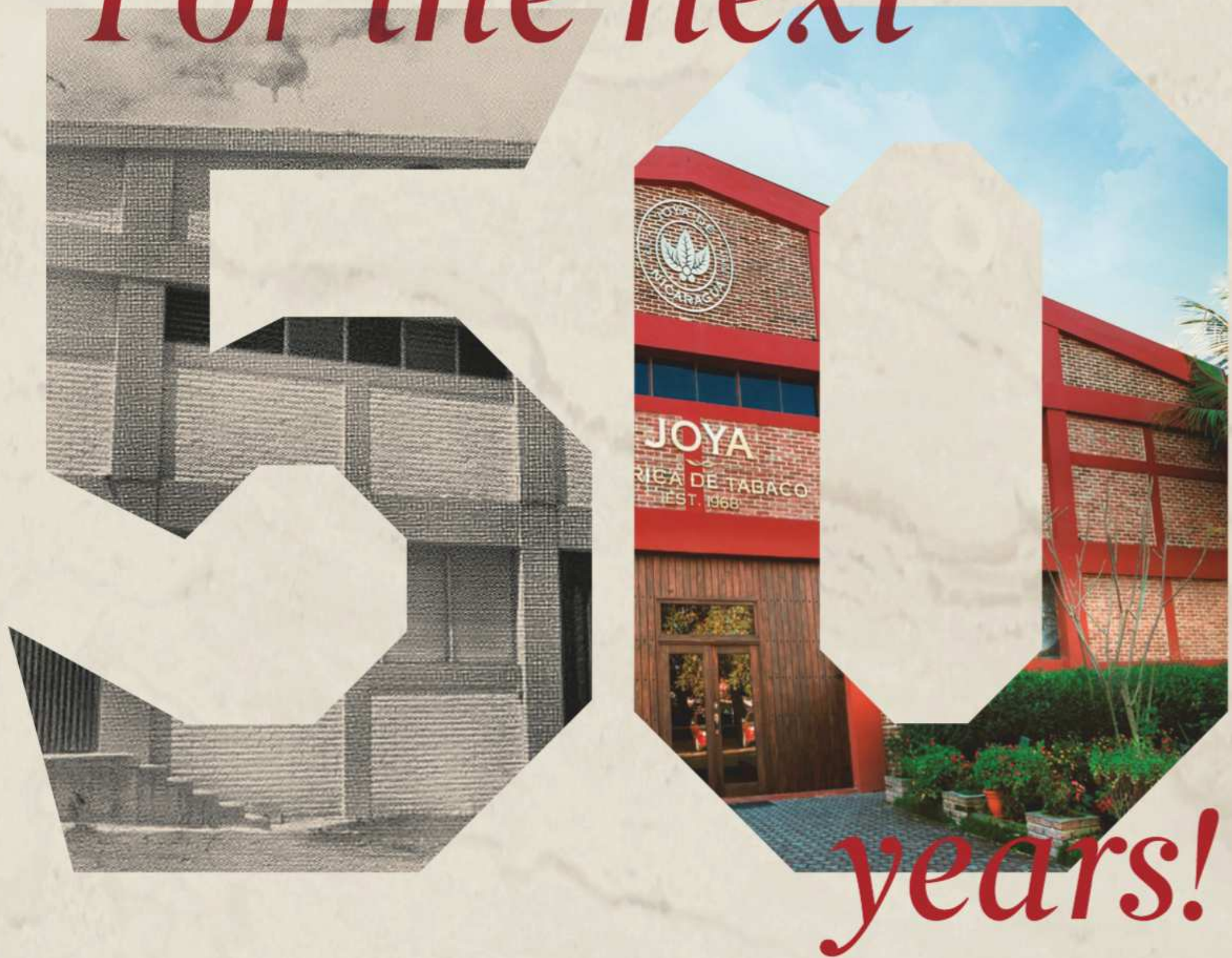
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: MEXICO, NICARAGUA
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: MEXICO

CASA TURRENT 1880 SUI GÉNERIS

Big and blocky, this box-pressed toro delivers an oaky, earthy smoke with hints of coconut and maple candy, but the finish is muddled and charry.
U.S.: \$17.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

85

For the next



Thank you for accompanying us these last five decades. Thank you for allowing us to pioneer an industry by crafting the first cigars to ever come out of Nicaragua. Thank you for your support, and for making us the most international brand of our country. Thank you for your appreciation, and for recognizing the artful craft of our people. But more importantly, thank you for looking ahead with us, and for the next 50 years!

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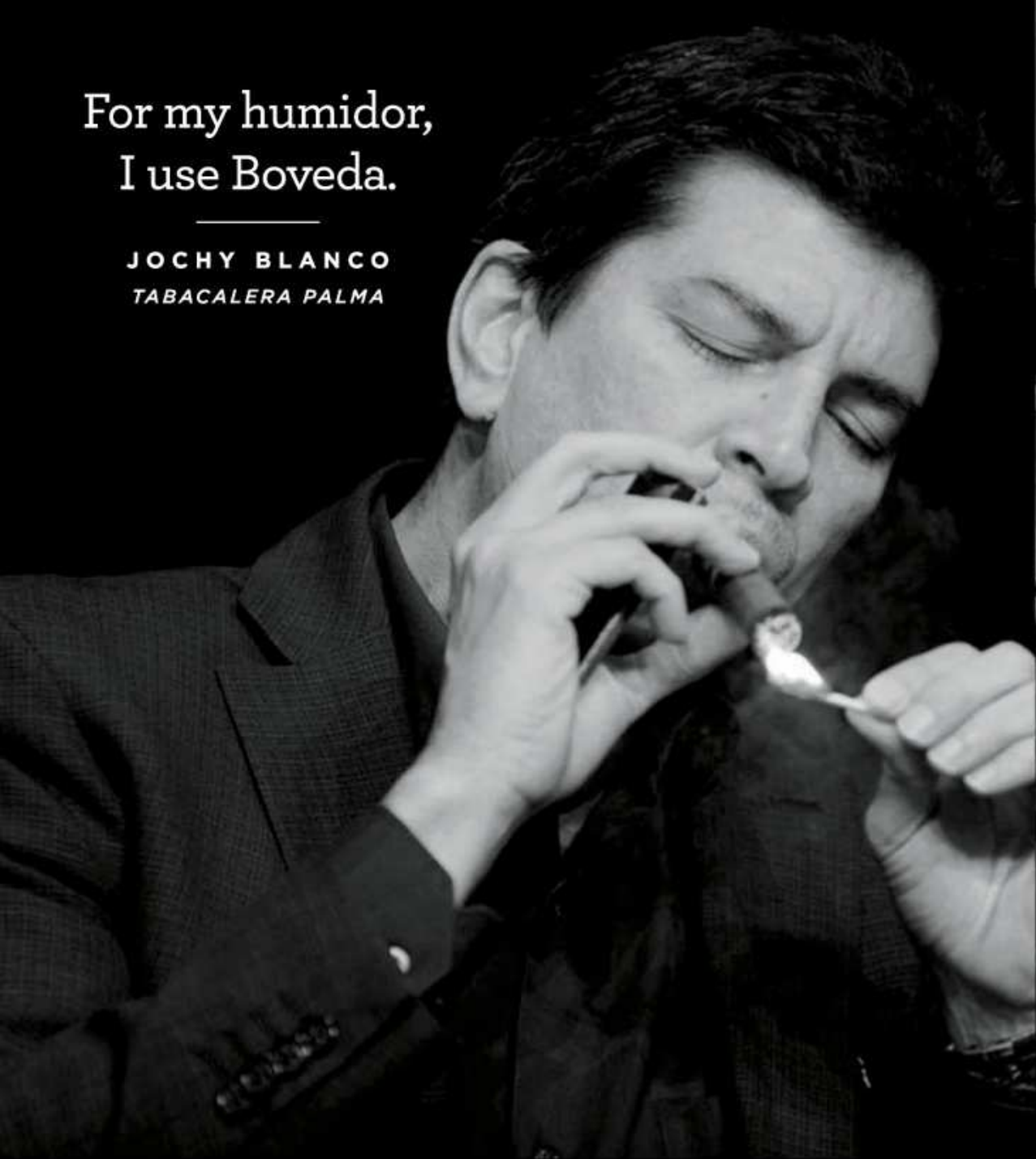
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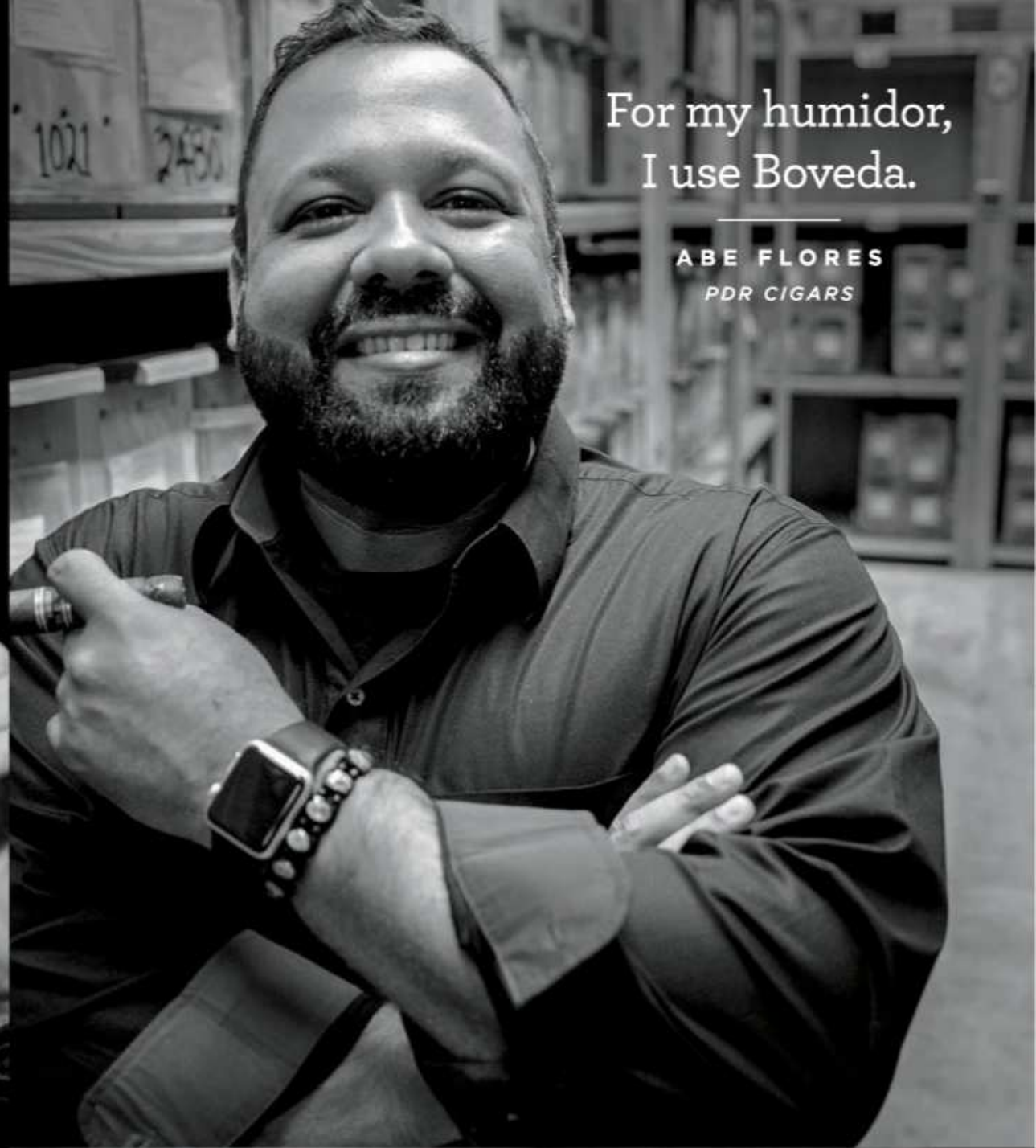
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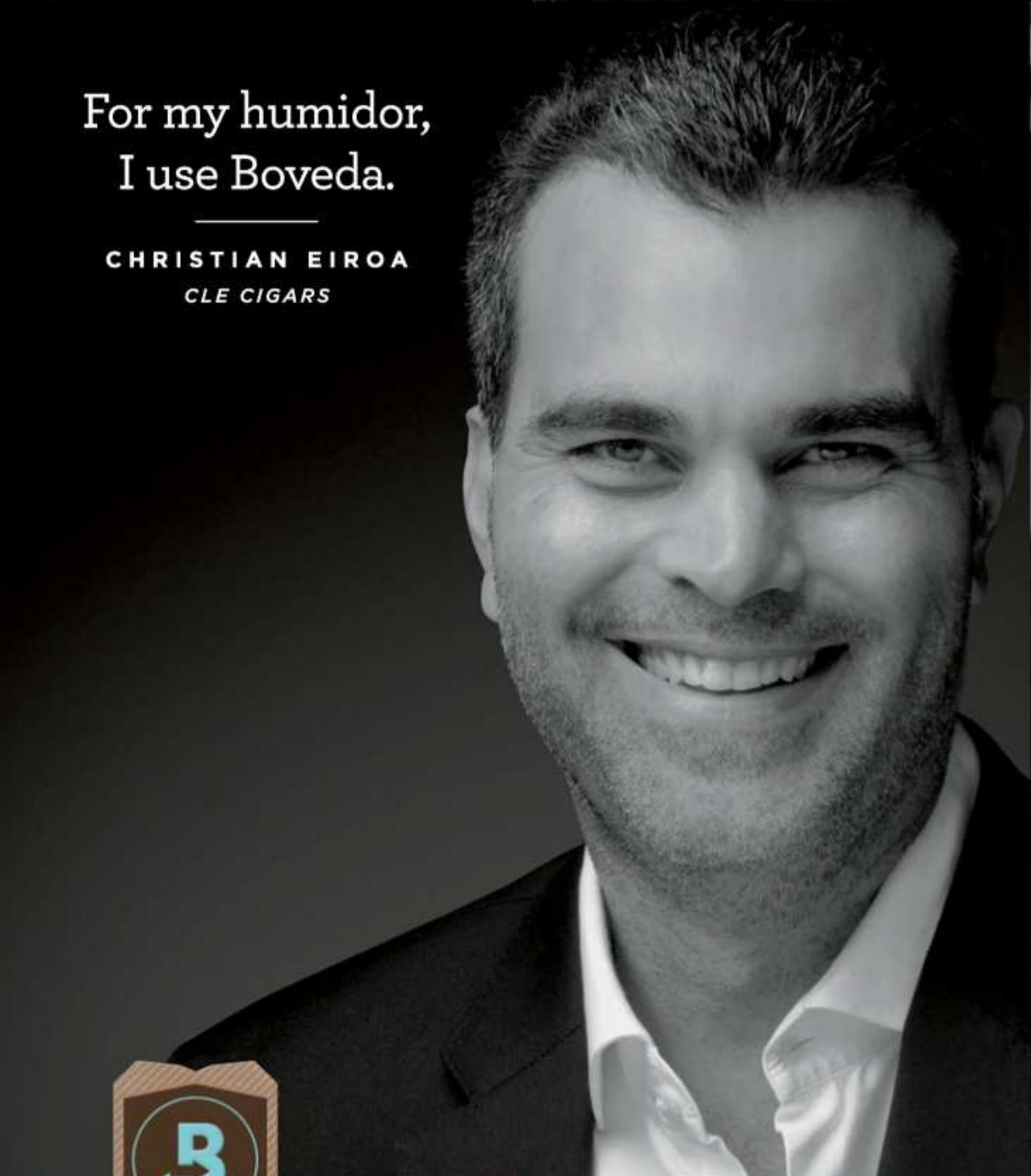
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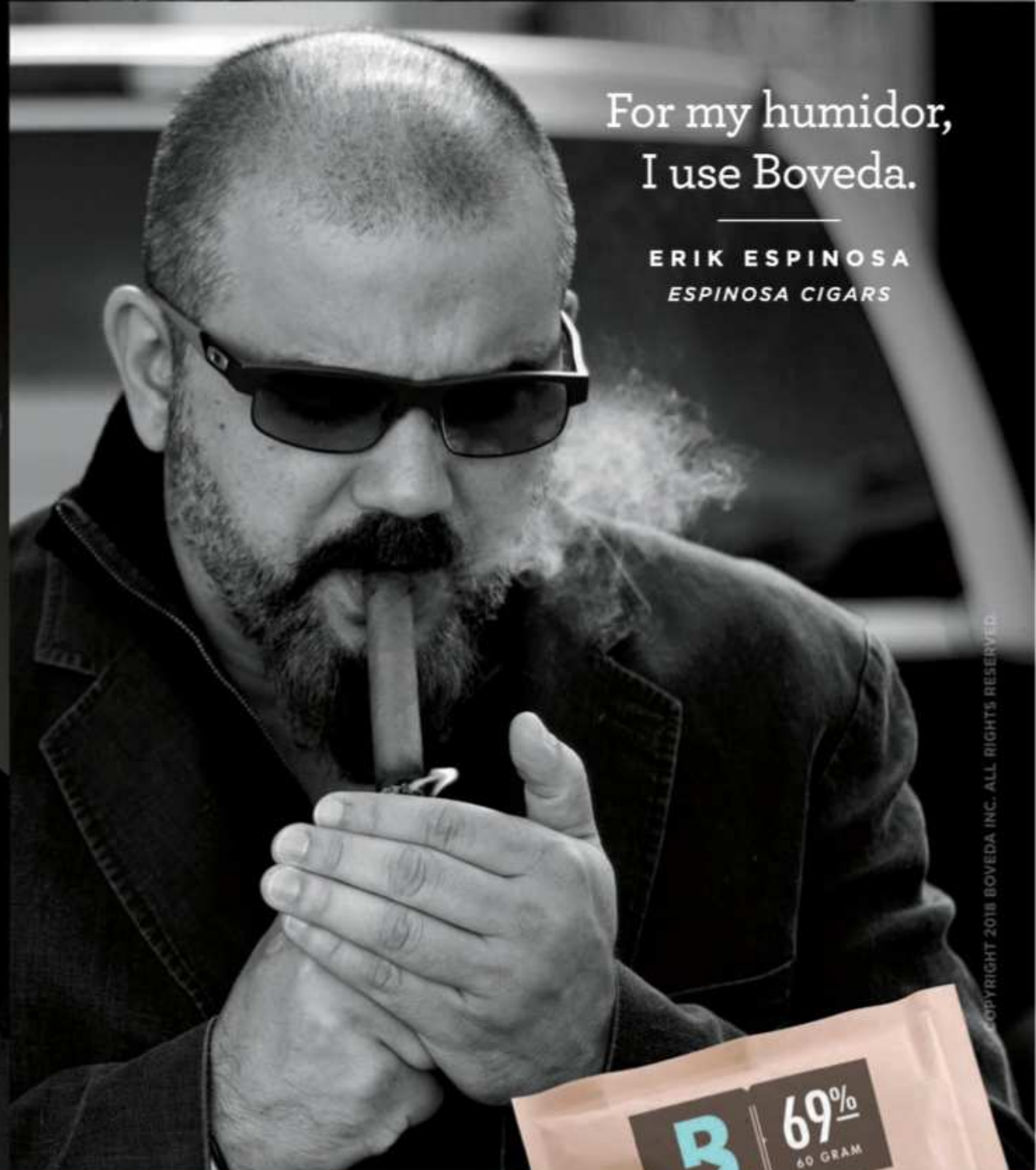
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It's difficult to blend a mild cigar with distinctive character. Conversely, it's just as challenging to blend a full-bodied cigar that has balance. But the Flor de Las Antillas Belicoso scored an astonishing 95 points for achieving just that—power and grace. The high score makes the cigar an instant classic on our rating scale, and it's a showcase of the blender's art, as it's both bold and intense, but maintains a steady procession of flavor without ever becoming borish or overpowering. Like a well-paced meal, the cigar builds, starting off more medium bodied and developing in both body and richness. More astonishing than its performance is the price. Cigars that score 95 points are rare in our pages, but to have one that retails for \$7.50 is more than a mere bargain. It's a treasure. The Cuban San Cristobal de La Habana La Punta achieved 92 points, and is one of Cuba's smaller, newer brands. It isn't one of the best-known names in the world of Cuban cigars, nor is it available in every market, but if you come across this charming belicoso in your travels, you might want to consider it alongside some of Cuba's bigger brands.



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

FLOR DE LAS ANTILLAS BELICOSO

Sophisticated and rich with a savory, leathery core that complements every sweet note of marzipan and white chocolate without losing its bold character. The finish is toasty and delicious.

U.S.: \$7.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

95



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: FEBRUARY 2014

SAN CRISTOBAL DE LA HABANA LA PUNTA

A softly pressed belicoso that smokes evenly and consistently. It imparts a toasty smoke balanced by notes of nuts, caramel a bit of spice and a floral finish.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £21.77 STRENGTH: Medium

92



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

E.P. CARRILLO ENCORE VALIENTES

The toasty smoke of this box-pressed torpedo shows pleasing notes of graham cracker, almond and a touch of sweet herbs. The finish is nutty.

U.S.: \$12.25 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA GALERA 1936 BOX PRESSED TORPEDO

There's a pipe-tobacco sweetness to this neatly pressed torpedo, which is balanced by notes of wood and graham cracker, though the finish has a touch of char.

U.S.: \$8.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

MICALLEF HERENCIA HABANO TORPEDO

Box-pressed with an unevenly colored wrapper, this torpedo is bready and yeasty at first, warming to show a toastier, nuttier character settling in to sweet notes of marzipan. The finish is a bit flinty.

U.S.: \$11.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: DECEMBER 2015

VEGUEROS MAÑANITA

The slightly airy draw of this mini torpedo imparts a nutty, easygoing smoke enlivened by notes of orange peel, cinnamon and crushed almonds.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £10.73 STRENGTH: Medium

90



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

PLASENCIA COSECHA 146 SAN AGUSTIN

Solid to the touch, this figurado has a firm draw, but still imparts plenty of woody notes that carry touches of minerals, pepper and vanilla.
U.S.: \$13.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

89



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 3/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

TATUAJE AVION 11

A full, lush draw floods the palate with notes of malted chocolate, raisins and coffee, but the smoke becomes a bit tart, leaving a dry finish.
U.S.: \$10.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

89



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

UNDERCROWN SHADE BELICOSO

Initial puffs of this lightly colored cigar are notably sharp, but the sharpness fades, ushering in creamy sweetness and a nutty, almond-paste finish.
U.S.: \$8.80 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

LA FLOR DOMINICANA DOUBLE LIGERO CHISELITO MADURO

Dark and gleaming, this oily corona has a wedge-shaped head. The draw is a bit firm, and the smoke is bracingly spicy with strong notes of earth and cedar. A powerful blend that could use some sweetness.
U.S.: \$8.10 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

88



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

LA AURORA 107 MADURO BELICOSO

The draw of this torpedo is slightly airy, and its smoke is a bit muddled, as notes of cocoa and earth combine with notes of minerals and charred wood.
U.S.: \$9.24 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

87



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 5/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: MARCH 2018

CUABA DISTINGUIDOS

An impressive figurado to behold with shapely tapers and a rich-looking wrapper. It's a very earthy smoke with intermittent notes of wood and walnuts.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £25.24 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

86



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

ASHTON AGED MADURO PYRAMID

A blackish torpedo with a rough texture and uneven burn. Sweet intonations of marshmallow and vanilla are quickly overtaken by vegetal notes that leave a harsh, bitter aftertaste.
U.S.: \$12.65 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

83

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The brand name is quirky and the size might have you scratching your head, but the Room101 Farce It Is A Magnum scored 92 points and showed a rather playful balance of spices that ranged from sweet to fiery. The name and the blend are reflections of brand owner Matt Booth, who has always taken a whimsical, yet interesting approach to cigars. The thick, 60 ring gauge allowed for ample blending of tobacco from five countries. Made in the Dominican Republic, this is the first Room101 brand released by Booth since he left Davidoff of Geneva in 2017 and went out on his own. The CLE Connecticut 60x6 scored 91 points and is made in Honduras. The name CLE are the initials of brand owner Christian Luis Eiroa, who frequently uses the Honduran tobacco grown on his family farms.



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: U.S.A./PENN. BROADLEAF,
DOM. REP., NICARAGUA, ECUADOR
BINDER: INDONESIA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ROOM101 FARCE IT IS A MAGNUM
This thick log of a cigar has a lush draw and even burn. Bold notes of cinnamon, nutmeg and vanilla crescendo to a spicy, piquant finish of ground red pepper.
U.S.: \$12.90 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

92



HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: HONDURAS, PERU,
NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

CLE CONNECTICUT 60X6
A blond, lightly hued cigar with plenty of spice and mineral notes to segue into a complex palate of leather, orange peel and black pepper.
U.S.: \$8.36 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

91



HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: HONDURAS
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

ALEC BRADLEY MEDALIST GORDO
Notes of wood, vanilla and lemon citrus come through this fat smoke. The finish is bright and lasting, showing hints of spice and sweetness.
U.S.: \$7.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

89



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: CAMEROON
WRAPPER: MEXICO

CAO ZÓCALO SAN ANDRÉS
Draped in a dark, toothy wrapper, this fat cigar has an open draw and even burn. Notes of hickory and spicy wood meld pleasantly with touches of herbs and spice.
U.S.: \$8.49 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

CORNELIUS & ANTHONY MERIDIAN GORDO
A massive log with a colorado wrapper and lush, even burn. It's a woody, herbal smoke with enough nuttiness to balance notes of lemon zest and a mineral finish.
U.S.: \$11.25 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

**PADRÓN 1964 ANNIVERSARY SERIES
NO. 4 MADURO**

This immense, box-pressed cigar has the appearance of a chocolate bar—and some chocolate notes, too, along with hints of coffee and black cherry, though the finish is light and herbal.

U.S.: \$21.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ROCKY PATEL 15TH ANNIVERSARY SIXTY

Dark and gleaming with oil, the wrapper of this cigar is clean and nearly veinless. Initial acidity mellows to show earth, coffee and tangy notes of fresh pine, but a persistently uneven burn hurt the score.

U.S.: \$13.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

**PDR 1878 CAPA SUN GROWN
DOUBLE MAGNUM**

Made with a knotted pigtail cap and uncut foot, this thick gordo burns unevenly. Notes of crushed black pepper, juniper and herbs lead to a charcoal finish.

U.S.: \$7.43 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

87



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: BRAZIL, NICARAGUA
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: MEXICO

UNDERCROWN GORDITO

A sweet and woody smoke with subtle underlying spice, but the sweetness turns saccharine and a poor burn never corrects itself, despite multiple relights.

U.S.: \$10.80 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

87



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 5 7/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

INCH NATURAL BY E.P. CARRILLO NO. 60

A thick cigar with a rustic wrapper and uneven burn. Earthy and herbal, the cigar brings some woodiness and vanilla notes, but the smoke remains heavily earthy throughout.

U.S.: \$9.55 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

86



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 5 3/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

**LA FLOR DOMINICANA LIGERO OSCURO
NATURAL CABINET L-500**

A strikingly oily cigar with a gleaming wrapper and flat head. Notes of leather and cardamom come in and out, as do hints of minerals and chalk. The finish is bitter.

U.S.: \$9.20 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

86



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: MEXICO

KRISTOFF SAN ANDRÉS 660

A black log of a cigar with a coiled pigtail cap and uncut foot. Traces of earth and cocoa are overwhelmed by touches of acidity and a metallic aftertaste.

U.S.: \$9.90 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

84

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One doesn't normally associate richness and body with cigars wrapped in Connecticut shade, nor does one associate a \$5 cigar with very high scores, but the Charter Oak CT Shade Rothschild shatters both preconceived notions. It scored 93 points for its abundance of complex flavors as well as its medium-to-full body. The brand comes to us via the Foundation Cigar Co., owned by Nicholas Melillo, who decided to price this cigar in value-brand territory. It's the highest-rated smoke of the category and one of the best values of the issue. The Cuban Montecristo Edmundo scored 92 points, unfolding the luxurious layers of complexity expected from such a storied Cuban brand.



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: INDONESIA
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

CHARTER OAK CT SHADE ROTHSCCHILD

Rich woods and complex herbs set the tone for this attractive robusto. Each puff leaves impressions of oaky vanilla, spearmint and caraway seeds along with floral notes and a cashew nuttiness.

U.S.: \$5.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

93



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 3/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JANUARY 2017

MONTECRISTO EDMUNDO

Slightly pressed with a wrapper that's silky to the touch. The smoke layers the palate with an ample almond nuttiness met by notes of orange peel, oak and a coffee-like, Sumatra-bean finish.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £23.65 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

92



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

AGING ROOM PURA CEPA RONDO

This well-made robusto has a lush draw and even burn. Its earthy smoke is sweetened by touches of almonds, cocoa and honeyed wood before a black cherry finish.

U.S.: \$12.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 7/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: APRIL 2017

BOLIVAR ROYAL CORONA (TUBO)

Topped with a notably flat head and four-seam cap, this robusto is a leathery-tasting smoke with floral undertones, hints of nutmeg and an earthy finish.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £22.13 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 4 3/4"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2016

H. UPMANN MAGNUM 54

There's a lemony, citrus quality to this fat robusto that frames its core of graham cracker, malted chocolate and floral notes. It exudes a cinnamon aroma as it burns.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £23.72 STRENGTH: Medium

90



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 4 3/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: MEXICO

LA MISSION L'ATELIER 1959

Dark and trunk pressed with a coarsely-made pigtail. It draws evenly, showing the bold, malty qualities of a coffee-stout brew. Sweet notes of chocolate and marshmallow also emerge before the coffee finish.

U.S.: \$8.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LAST CALL BY AJ FERNANDEZ PEQUEÑAS
A short robusto draped in a matte wrapper that extends over the foot. Its sweet, honey aroma recurs on the palate, along with fruity notes of raisin and dried fig that pop with a slight, red-pepper spice.
U.S.: \$6.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

MY FATHER LE BIJOU 1922 PETIT ROBUSTO
An inky-dark robusto with an earthy core sweetened by notes of dried fruit, toffee and licorice, though the finish was a bit hot and charry.
U.S.: \$6.70 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: MEXICO

ESPINOSA ESPECIAL NO. 4
The top of this dark, oily cigar is punctuated by a round head and four-seam cap. First puffs communicate an herbal bouquet of botanicals—juniper, licorice and vanilla—before wood, black pepper and an ashy aftertaste.
U.S.: \$8.65 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

88



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

VILLIGER SAN'DORO CLARO ROBUSTO
A Connecticut-wrapped cigar with a very even draw and burn. It's a woody smoke with notes of hay, citrus and sweet nougat, but the finish is a bit muted.
U.S.: \$8.51 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

88



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

DIAMOND CROWN ROBUSTO NO. 5
An airy draw imparts a light smoke redolent of straw, hay and muted woods, but background notes of nutmeg become more prominent.
U.S.: \$11.75 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild

87



HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: MEXICO

PADILLA VINTAGE RESERVE ROBUSTO
Packed solid with tobacco, this box-pressed robusto draws evenly. Leathery at first, it takes on notes of vanilla and coffee before a sticky, licorice finish that clings to the palate.
U.S.: \$9.15 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

87



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA BARBA PURPLE 50 X 5
Clear, spicy notes of cumin and cardamom come through, along with white pepper and vanilla, but a bitter woody finish hurt the score of this veiny robusto.
U.S.: \$9.90 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

86



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 4 3/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.,
U.S.A./PENN. BROADLEAF
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR,
U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

QUESADA RESERVA PRIVADA BARBER-POLE ROBUSTO
A barber-pole cigar with a very round head. It's a bright and cedary smoke that hints of lemon zest and cinnamon. The finish is woody and a bit sharp.
U.S.: \$14.40 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

86

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buying guide

TOP SCORES, VALUES AND STRENGTH | BLIND TASTE TEST NO. 147

TOP SCORES



95 Flor de Las Antillas Belicoso
Nicaragua • \$7.50 • Figurado • Medium-Full



93 Casa Cuba Doble Tres
Dominican Republic • \$9.93 • Corona • Medium



93 Charter Oak CT Shade Rothschild
Nicaragua • \$5.00 • Robusto • Mild-Medium



93 La Colmena Amado No. 44
U.S.A. • \$14.72 • Corona • Medium



92 Gilberto Oliva Reserva Blanc 5.75x43
Nicaragua • \$5.75 • Corona • Mild-Medium



92 Hoyo de Monterrey Le Hoyo de San Juan
Cuba • £27.94 • Corona Gorda • Medium



92 Montecristo Edmundo
Cuba • £23.65 • Robusto • Medium-Full



92 Ramon Allones by AJ Fernandez Toro
Nicaragua • \$13.00 • Corona Gorda • Medium-Full



92 Room101 Farce It is a Magnum
Dominican Republic • \$12.90 • Grande • Medium-Full



92 San Cristobal de La Habana La Punta
Cuba • £21.77 • Figurado • Medium



92 San Cristobal Quintessence Corona Gorda
Nicaragua • \$8.25 • Corona Gorda • Medium-Full

TOP VALUES



93 Charter Oak CT Shade Rothschild
Nicaragua • \$5.00 • Robusto • Mild-Medium



92 Gilberto Oliva Reserva Blanc 5.75x43
Nicaragua • \$5.75 • Corona • Mild-Medium



91 La Aurora 1903 Cameroon Churchill
Dominican Republic • \$6.00 • Churchill • Medium



90 Last Call by AJ Fernandez Pequeñas
Nicaragua • \$6.00 • Robusto • Medium-Full

MILDER CIGARS

90 Illusione Haut 10 Churchill
Nicaragua • \$17.95 • Churchill • Mild-Medium

90 Serino Royale Connecticut Churchill
Nicaragua • \$10.00 • Churchill • Mild-Medium

89 Alec Bradley Medalist Gordo
Honduras • \$7.00 • Grande • Mild-Medium

89 Undercrown Shade Belicoso
Nicaragua • \$8.80 • Figurado • Mild-Medium

88 Archetype Dreamstate Churchill
Dominican Republic • \$12.78 • Churchill • Mild-Medium

MEDIUM-BODIED CIGARS

91 CLE Connecticut 60x6
Honduras • \$8.36 • Grande • Medium

91 La Aurora 1903 Cameroon Churchill
Dominican Republic • \$6.00 • Churchill • Medium

91 Punch Sir David Exclusivo Hong Kong
Cuba • CHINA: HK\$388 • Churchill • Medium

90 Vegueros Mañanita
Cuba • £10.73 • Figurado • Medium

90 Ashton Estate Sun Grown 20-Year Salute
Dominican Republic • \$20.00 • Churchill • Medium

STRONGER SMOKES

91 Alec Bradley Nica Puro Diamond Rough Cut
Nicaragua • \$9.13 • Corona Gorda • Medium-Full

91 Nat Cicco Aniversario 1965 Liga No. 4 Churchill
Nicaragua • \$7.29 • Churchill • Medium-Full

90 Bolivar Royal Corona (Tubo)
Cuba • £22.13 • Robusto • Medium-Full

89 Tatuaje Avion 11
Nicaragua • \$10.00 • Figurado • Full

89 Henry Clay Rustic Cheroot
Honduras • \$4.25 • Corona • Full

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94 ROMEO Y JULIETA DUNHILL SUN-GROWN BREVA (1959)

This cabinet of 50 pre-Castro cigars has unusual packaging, and the smaller cigars inside come packed in foil. The smokes are dark brown, and roughish in texture, a nod to the sun-grown wrappers with which they are made, and they measure a little more than five inches in length, with a ring gauge of around 44. It's a well-made cigar, and it gives off a chocolaty aroma as it burns. It doesn't have a typical taste or finish of a pre-Castro cigar. There are tones of black pepper and some charred, burnt qualities. Stronger than most with this type of age. —*Marvin R. Shanken*



96 MONTECRISTO NO. 1 (1989)

This 29-year-old lonsdale is drop-dead gorgeous, with a silky wrapper and superb construction. The burn is even, the draw somewhat firm. It's quite woody, with hints of almond paste, graham crackers and earth, and deep into the smoke it takes on a light note of cocoa powder. There's plenty of strength and character in these old leaves. —*David Savona*



94 ROMEO Y JULIETA BELICOSO (2001)

Even after 17 years in the humidor, this belicoso remains supple and silky. An interesting contrast of dried flowers and exotic incense prefaced the steady core of nutmeg, walnuts and cinnamon. Woodiness was notably absent, as the paper-lined dress box allowed the tobacco to age neutrally. The cigar is superbly crafted, and smoked in three solid ashes. —*Gregory Mottola*



89 PAUL GARMIRIAN P.G. NO 1 LANCERO (1991)

This nicely rolled panetela was made in the Dominican Republic 27 years ago. It has a coil cap, and wears a golden-brown wrapper devoid of oils. The draw is firm, but it still delivers plenty of smoke, which imparts notes of soft wood with some toasted vanilla. A bit of toffee and light espresso come through on the finish. —*Andrew Nagy*



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Top Dominican Cigars to Buy Now

BY DAVID CLOUGH

It's no secret some of the best cigars in the world are made in the Dominican Republic. They vary in terms of flavor and strength, from the mild to the more muscle-bound. Here are 11 of the top-scoring Dominican cigars of 2018, and the three that have been given our highest accolade. They're smoking beautifully right now.

Casa Cuba Doble Tres

This slim cigar (it measures 5 1/2 inches by 44 ring) is the thinnest in the Casa Cuba line, a brand blended by the great Carlos Fuente Sr., who passed in 2016. Elegant and refined, this corona is a must for any Fuente fan.

93 points • \$9.93 • Medium

E.P. Carrillo Encore Majestic

Rolled in Santiago under the watchful eye of Ernesto Perez-Carrillo, this all-Nicaraguan Encore isn't the powerhouse you might expect. At 5 3/8 inches by 52 ring gauge, it shows notes of English breakfast tea and caramel around a pleasantly woody core.

93 points • \$11.50 • Medium

Arturo Fuente Hemingway Classic

Draped in an African Cameroon cover leaf, this perfecto measures 7 inches by 46 ring. The Hemingway line is composed entirely of shapely figurados, but this relatively skinny size is particularly striking.

92 points • \$9.55 • Medium



Ashton Virgin Sun Grown Robusto

Donning a dark, Ecuadoran sun-grown wrapper and measuring 5 1/2 inches by 50 ring gauge, the Ashton VSG Robusto (as it's commonly abbreviated) is a full-bodied blend that smacks of oak wood, cocoa and nuts. Bold, yet balanced.

92 points • \$11.25 • Full

Ashton Aged Maduro No. 60

For maduro fans, this big cigar (7 1/2 inches by 52 ring) has a Connecticut broadleaf wrapper. It's a perfect after-dinner cigar that will last all night. Smoke it when you have a couple of hours to unwind.

92 points • \$12.40 • Medium

Romeo y Julieta 1875 Cedro Deluxe No. 2

A relative bargain from Altadis that comes with a cedar sleeve. Underneath is an Indonesian cover leaf, and with a sub-\$7

price tag (before taxes), this 5 1/2-by-44 smoke is a budget-friendly performer.

92 points • \$6.72 • Medium



Trinidad Santiago Belicoso

Trinidad Santiago is rolled by cigarmaker Jochy Blanco, and it contains 100 percent Dominican tobacco. The 6-by-52 Belicoso has an earthy profile.

92 points • \$9.90 • Medium

Villiger La Flor de Ynclan Torpedo

La Flor de Ynclan is Villiger's fresh take on a long-discontinued Cuban brand. Don't let the light Ecuadoran wrapper fool you—the Torpedo (6 by 52) has plenty of character and strength. Unlike most Dominican cigars, it's made in Santo Domingo.

92 points • \$12.00 • Medium to Full

La Aurora 1903 Cameroon Churchill

Six bucks for a Churchill? Count us in. At 7 inches by 47 ring gauge, this high-scoring smoke—made by the oldest producer of cigars in the Dominican Republic—is one of the best values you'll find on the market.

91 points • \$6.00 • Medium

La Flor Dominicana Double Ligerio Chisel

Dark and gleaming with oils, this is an eye-catching figurado shaped like a stonemason's chisel. And like the tool for which it is named, it has strength. Measuring 6 inches by 54 ring, it's a big, bold cigar packed with powerful tobacco.

91 points • \$9.70 • Full

Project 805 Petite Corona

If you're short on time, but big on powerful cigars, look no further than the Project 805 Petite Corona. This 4-by-40 firecracker sells for less than \$5 and is blended solely from Dominican leaves, including a tobacco called andullo that's uncommon in most cigars.

91 points • \$4.99 • Full

3 D.R. Classics

Fuente Fuente OpusX Double Corona

Exceptionally crafted, complex, full-bodied, this is a triumph of cigarmaking. The Dominican puro measures 7 5/8 inches by 49 ring. Despite its official price of about \$17, don't be surprised to see it command much higher prices at retail due to its prestige and scarcity.

95 points • \$17.34 • Full

2005 Cigar of the Year



La Flor Dominicana Andalusian Bull

La Flor Dominicana's Litto Gomez has an affinity for cigars with interesting shapes. First there was the Chisel, a wedge-shaped cigar, and now there's the Andalusian Bull (above), a curvy Salomon born from an old cigar mold that he found in Belgium. At 6 1/2 inches by 64 ring, the Bull showcases a powerful marriage of strength and spice while remaining balanced.

96 points • \$15.80 • Full

2016 Cigar of the Year

Arturo Fuente Don Carlos Eye of the Shark

Eye of the Shark is a modified Arturo Fuente Don Carlos cigar, rolled with a special blend and presented in a unique shape measuring 5 3/4 inches by 52 ring. The cigar is box-pressed at the bottom and tapers into a rounded belicoso. As the full-bodied cigar burns, new layers of complexity unfold with every puff. A must-try cigar.

97 points • \$12.75 • Full

2017 Cigar of the Year

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Cuba's Best Cigar Tobacco Farms

Five small farms in Western Cuba grow some of the finest cigar tobacco leaves in the entire world BY GORDON MOTT



A gorgeous crop of shade-grown, Cuban-seed tobacco in mid harvest at Quemado de Rubi, a farm in Pinar del Río run by Hector Luís Prieto.

The Chinese-made sedan lurched down a one-lane dirt road, skirting puddles of water and seeking high ground between the deep ruts. The small town of San Luís is a few miles away, as the crow flies, but unlike the trip on the wings of a bird this journey by earth is long and slow. There had already been three stops, each of them to ask someone walking if anyone knew the whereabouts of Sergio Paz's farm.

Then it appeared, a wooden slat tobacco barn nearly jutting out into the reddish clay road, with a vintage tractor idling in front of an open door. The visitors stepped inside the dank, hot interior, with tobacco leaves hanging on horizontal poles all the way to the ceiling. The question was asked again: "Is Sergio Paz here?" From deep inside the barn, a small man in stained grey cotton pants, a white polo shirt and a black baseball cap walked out of the darkness and said, "I'm Sergio."

He was asked about his work. "I don't really have time to talk," he said. "I'm the only one who can drive the tractor, and I have to get leaves from a nearby field." When asked again, he agreed to a short chat. Fifteen minutes, no more. "We are having

a great year. Never seen one like this one in recent years," he said. At the time it was February, and the tobacco harvest was almost done. More questions, more answers, but the farmer began shifting from foot to foot, eager to get back on his tractor, eager to get back to the business of bringing in his crop from the field.

The farm of Sergio Paz is considered one of the greatest tobacco producing farms in Cuba. For a cigar smoker, Pinar del Río and the Vuelta Abajo may conjure up images of vast fields of tobacco with bright green leaves moving gently in an afternoon breeze. But in reality, the lands where Cuba's finest tobacco is grown are quite small. Within about 100 square miles, the areas around two Cuban towns—San Luís and San Juan y Martínez—occupy the heart of the broader tobacco-growing region. Many consider them the finest tobacco lands in the entire world. It is where growers like Paz weave their agronomic magic.

The passage of time in Cuba has obscured the names of the great vegas, or farms, where the best tobacco has been grown for more than 150 years. Legendary names like Hoyo de Monterrey, near San Juan y Martínez, and El Corojo, near San Luís aren't

“We use some new varieties of tobacco, but the tradition, the way we plant, the way we harvest are all the same.” —Hector Luís Prieto

mentioned often today in the same hushed and reverent tones as they were before. It’s even whispered that El Corojo, the birthplace of the Corojo seed long prized by connoisseurs, is unproductive today. Furthermore, no single farm is associated with a cigar brand, as they often used to be before the Cuban Revolution in 1959. The Cuban government reportedly maintains a list of the vegas *finas*, or Cuba’s best tobacco farms, although they are reluctant to make public that information.

But the farmers know which farms are the best, and who is producing the finest tobacco in Cuba. Based on visits during the last five years to the Vuelta Abajo, CIGAR AFICIONADO has come up with a short list of the five top growers and their farms in the region. In some cases, such as Sergio Paz, they are only known by the grower’s name. Others have names akin to, perhaps, a famous dude ranch such as Cuchillas de Barbacoa of Alejandro Robaina fame, or Quemado de Rubi, run by Hector Luís Prieto.

There are no scientific criteria for the selection. Two of the farms are well-known worldwide, one has been promoted recently by Habanos S.A. and the other two farms were identified by fellow tobacco growers, off the beaten track and certainly off the usual stops for tourists wanting to experience an authentic Cuban tobacco farm.

This report reflects more about the tradition of tobacco in Cuba’s Vuelta Abajo, and not so much about the cigars in which that tobacco ends up. In the old days, factories producing specific brands had formulas for the blends that included place names, or farms which supplied the factory directly with tobacco. But no longer. Today, cigar tobacco, after it has been cured on the farms, is processed and sorted in regional warehouses and then shipped around the country to factories where it is needed. Cohiba, according to some reports, still receives tobacco from a select group of farms; many speculate about which farms supply the bulk of tobacco for Cohiba but there is no officially sanctioned public list. If you are lucky enough to get inside a loading dock or receiving area in a Cuban cigar factory, you may see tobacco bales with codes and even some place names but there’s no guarantee that the factory will get the same mix of tobacco next year or the year after.

The farms are not listed in any order of excellence but by location. An intrepid cigar lover could travel this way and see Cuba’s most talented growers, and—in many cases—smoke a cigar rolled from the local leaves, right on the premises.

Cuchillas de Barbacoa/Hirochi Robaina

The Robaina family has operated this tobacco farm since 1845, and a fifth generation descendent, Hirochi Robaina, is running it today. The farm is located near the town of San Luís, and is approached

through a rutted, red clay road best traveled in a four-wheel SUV. The Cuchillas de Barbacoa emblazoned on one of the curing barn roofs can be seen from the road as you approach.

Entry means passing through a rusting green iron gate, under an arch with the name Alejandro Robaina, the former patriarch who passed away in 2010. The road ends in a dusty courtyard. There is a stand of palm trees surrounded by tobacco curing barns, two small houses, one with a museum to Alejandro Robaina, and a large thatched roof pavilion where guests are entertained and fed. Cuchillas de Barbacoa consists of 17 hectares (about 42 acres), and 7.5 hectares (about 18 acres) are dedicated to growing tobacco with an average annual production of 20,000 pounds of tobacco. Half of the production is shade tobacco for wrappers, and half is filler tobacco. The rest of the land is used for growing vegetables and fruits. “We use the same farming techniques that my ancestors did,” Hirochi Robaina says, sitting in a cane-backed wooden chair and smoking a cigar rolled on the premises with tobacco from the farm. The cigars are full-bodied with a wonderful earthy flavor.

Hirochi follows in his late grandfather’s footsteps, including a tradition he maintains every September. That’s when Hirochi says his grandfather used to sit on the front porch and wait for a north wind that heralded the end of the hurricane season; if it came, it was time to get ready to plant.

Ivan Maximo Perez

The highway to San Juan y Martínez makes a slow curve to the left, and a dirt lane cuts up to the left between two rows of royal palm trees. Ivan Maximo Perez, known simply as “Maximo,” is the third generation running the six hectare (15 acre) farm, five of shade tobacco and one of sun-grown. Between 10 and 12 workers share the workload with him. “My grandfather and my father passed on the knowledge about the climate and the farm here,” Maximo says, “and

now that is linked with science for the changing climate.” Maximo has shifted almost entirely to organic fertilizers, without the use of fungicides and only 30 percent of insecticides he used to apply to the fields. “We had to find alternatives in the early ’90s when we didn’t have chemicals or even gasoline,” Maximo says.

Maximo says that he has improved the soil every year over the last 10 years; one method of improvement is by planting a type of bean in the off-season to put more organic material in the soil. Maximo has been using seeds recommended by the Tobacco Institute, and his field has been a testing ground for new hybrids. “I really like Criollo 2010,” he says, partly because it retains the flavor profile of Cuba’s black tobacco. He also uses Corojo 2012 in both his shade- and sun-grown areas.

This farm usually yields about 15 tons of tobacco every year, which is then processed in three curing barns on the property.



Farmer Hector Luís Prieto, with his ever-present cigar.

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This location has also become one of the official stops on the cigar tourism tours. There is a new pavilion about the size of a basketball court, with chairs and tables and a wooden bar. “Would you like a cigar?” Maximo asks, as he opens up a wooden box on the table in front of us. “This one has a filler tobacco from 2014 and wrapper from the 2016-2017 crop. I rolled it myself.” It was a beautiful smoke.

Quemado de Rubi/Hector Luís Prieto

The next stop, about two miles from the main highway, near a bend in the Río Feo, is the farm of Hector Luís Prieto, arguably the most famous Cuban tobacco grower today after Robaina. His family has tilled the farm for 100 years. “We had always maintained the same traditions,” says Prieto. “We use some new varieties of tobacco, but the tradition, the way we plant, the way we harvest are all the



The Robaina farm (left), known as Cuchillas de Barbacoa, is Cuba’s most famous field. Gerardo Medina Relova (right) standing by one of his curing barns.

same.” The farm’s planting was expanded in 2017-2018 to 10 hectares (24 acres), with 300,000 plants in the ground; the previous year he had planted only about 200,000—60 percent of them under shade and the rest sun-grown. Prieto has a full-time roller who prepares cigars for his visitors, in a two-story thatched roof pavilion with an attached guest room. The cigars are full-bodied, with beautiful reddish-brown or colorado wrappers.

Prieto believes the new hybrids they are using are every bit as good as the older varieties, and “they have a great flavor.” He planted Corojo 2012 last year, which is a cross with Habano ’92, one of the original hybrids created in the early ’90s.

On this farm, the plantings are differentiated by geography. Prieto plants his shade tobacco on higher ground, about 100 yards above the river that rolls slowly through his land, and sun-grown next to the river. “It is soil that is perfect for shade tobacco,” Prieto, a former Habanos Man of the Year for production, says as he looks upon his fields.

Gerardo Medina Relova

The farm sits up on a rise with a view of the buildings in San Juan y Martínez, located only two miles away. This is the land tilled by Gerardo Medina Relova, and he has 12 hectares (30 acres) of tobacco growing here. Half of it is sun-grown, planted around his homestead

and the other half is shade, grown at a nearby location. Like the other top farms in Cuba, Medina’s sits at the end of a tiny dirt road that passes small one-room huts and small non-tobacco fields.

There are 25 workers on the vega, which stretches around three tobacco barns that sit up on top of a rise. Medina, who says he was born “under a tobacco leaf,” took a break from farming for a bit, and spent some time as a chemical engineer in Havana until 1996, when his father fell into ill health and he moved back to the farm where he absorbed all his father’s experience. When his father died in 2016, he took over the entire tobacco operation; he had been running it on his own for nearly a decade. “We have a gift from God here,” Medina says, sitting in his small living room taking a break from the blistering noon-day sun. “It’s up to us to use it well and keep making it better.”

Sergio Paz Cordoves

This farm is the smallest of the big five, with only 4.5 hectares of shade under cultivation and less than a hectare of sun-grown. “I have 140,000 plants under shade, and 30,000 in the sun,” says Sergio Paz Cordoves. Fifteen to 20 people work here.

Paz says his 2017-2018 crop was great, better than the previous harvest, which was affected by green spots on the wrapper leaves. “I’ve never seen a year like this one,” he says. Paz has planted the hybrids Corojo 2010 and 2012 in recent years, but he doesn’t like the results. He loves Criollo ’98 and Corojo ’99, which is what he planted in 2017-2018. “I took a chance this year because both can be affected by black shank,” Paz says, “but it was a perfect year so I had no disease.”

Paz’s family has worked this land since the 1940s. He took over after his father, Antonio María Paz Valladares, died in 2016. Lin Paz, as he was known, was considered by his peers to be a tobacco magician on the same level as the much more famous Alejandro Robaina. Paz began working here 23 years ago, when his father couldn’t work anymore. “I studied at his feet and learned everything he had to teach me,” Paz says. He learned many secrets from his father, from preparation of the land, to managing a tobacco barn in dry or humid conditions, and when the tobacco was ready to be picked. “It was like getting a master’s degree in tobacco from my father,” he says. ♦



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Al Romas and Al Ducharme celebrate the completion of their web series in Tampa, Florida. To honor the special occasion, they lit up a pair of Liga Privada Único Serie Velvet Rat cigars, a limited-edition release from Drew Estate.



Tilman Firestone and his son Josh sip Scotch whisky and indulge in the pleasures of a fine handmade cigar with good friends Jeff Huisman and Zack Tenhaeff at the Montecristo Cigar Bar at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, Nevada.



On the day of his daughter Kristin's wedding, Peter Herrschaft of Holbrook, New York, enjoys handmade cigars with his new son-in-law Kris Tierney, right, and friend Michael Becker, center, at their reception in Bali, Indonesia.



Fed up with local smoking bans, Justin O'Brien of Ontario, Canada, decided to open his home as a "cigar-friendly establishment." On this occasion, Justin and friends open a box of Alec Bradley cigars to pair with Four Roses Bourbon.



Anthony Rondinelli puffs on a C.A.O. Italia Robusto, while his uncle Pasquale Rondinelli savors an A.J. Fernandez Ave Maria cigar at the 92nd Annual Italian Festival at the Our Lady of Mount Carmel church in Enfield, Connecticut.



There's no better way to spend a beautiful day than puffing on a handmade cigar with a good friend. Smoking buddies Frank Pipitone and Jim Browski gather in Washington, New Jersey, to light up a couple of Aging Room cigars.



Chris Short and Steve Griswold relax with an excellent pairing of Cuban Montecristo No. 2 cigars and Irish Carlsberg beers after hitting the links at Tralee Golf Club in Tralee, Ireland.



Newlywed Brandon Charriere lights up on his wedding day in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, with family members Heath Webb, Phill Torchio Jr., Barry Charriere, Phil Torchio Sr. and Brent Charriere.



At his 50th birthday party—aptly named “Smoke on the Water”—Drew Hawkins celebrates with good drinks, good smokes and great company on a fine night in Pasadena, Maryland.



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John, Cindy, Jack and DawnAnn Wilmot savor handmade cigars from Rocky Patel while taking in the spectacular views of The Links At Spanish Bay on a sunny day in Pebble Beach, California.



Walter Menaged, Brent Sembler and Gary Lieberman enjoy golfing in the great outdoors while puffing on a few La Gran Ofertas from My Father Cigars in Aspen, Colorado.



Joe Ferry Jr. shares a special bonding moment with his son Christopher as they celebrate his first job offer and mark the occasion with Fuente Fuente OpusX cigars in Waterbury, Connecticut.



Cousins Michael Cucarese, Krista Cucarese, Stephen Cucarese, John Viterito and Paul Cucarese enjoy premium handmade cigars during a family Fourth of July barbecue in Brooklyn, New York.

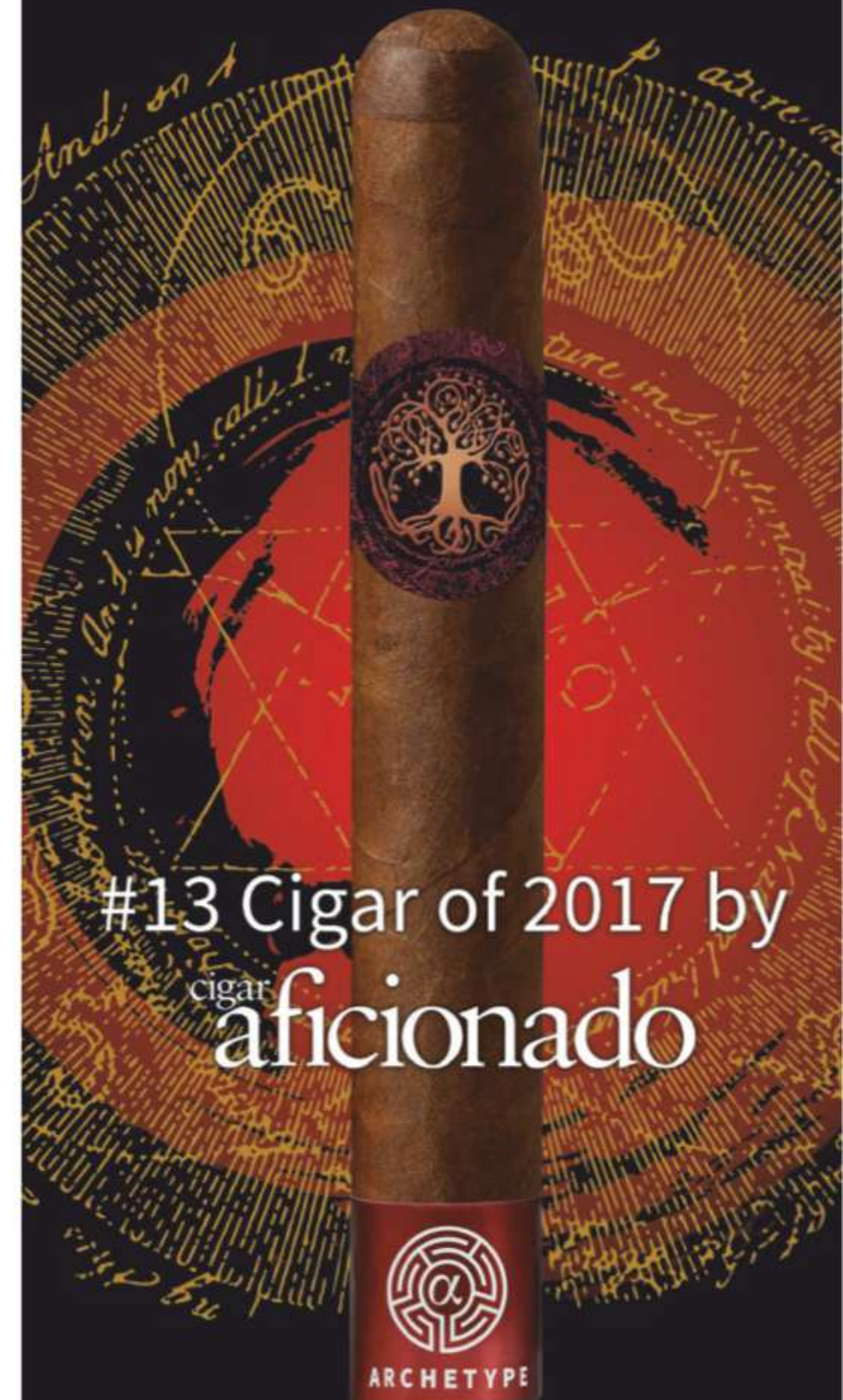


Jeff Koug, Chopin Chen, Rand Sluder, Ernie Jones, Natasha Vasandi, Nick Madole, Anjana Raman and Jeremie Craisse attend a cigar dinner at Longfellow's Wayside Inn in Sudbury, Massachusetts.



After a day spent playing golf at The Dunes Golf and Beach Club, Paul Anfinson and his son Joe bond over a pair of Arturo Fuente cigars while on vacation in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

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#13 Cigar of 2017 by
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Steve Walker, Wendy and Siafa Tolbert, John Beiswanger, Rick Walker and Dave Walker sample the local fare aboard the *MS Empress of the Seas* while the ship is docked in Havana, Cuba.



Former fighters Marlon Starling, Sal Cenicola, Ray Mercer and Bobby Czyz watch the Mayweather v. McGregor fight with friend John Shedd on Saint Simons Island, Georgia.



Dr. Lou Kareha, Dr. Tim Page, Dave Holcombe and Jonathan Jackowski of the Watkins Glen Cigar Club at Race Medical enjoy cigars at their annual NASCAR weekend in Watkins Glen, New York.

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Patrick Harris lights up a Cuban Montecristo 'A' while Bill Nardiello savors a Fuente Fuente OpusX on the morning after Patrick's wedding at Villa Soleia in Villefranche-sur-Mer, France.



Pat McCauley puffs on a cigar with her sons Tim, Tom, Dan and Mike McCauley while enjoying the excellent view atop Cunningham Gulch during a family vacation in Silverton, Colorado.



Friends Walter Pluas, Vinnie Rodriguez, Norge Coronel and Hernan Mujica savor the last days of summer on the Jersey Shore by indulging themselves with sunshine and handmade cigars.

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Father and son, Jeff and Sam Castell celebrate with cigars after Sam's graduation from the Farmer Business School at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio.



Golf partners Aaron Bieszczad and Mike Bogdan puff on cigars before playing in the annual Stone Oak Invitational golf tournament in Toledo, Ohio.



Bridesmaids Lauren Mitzel and Meghan Holmes celebrate Kristin Batchik's wedding to Joseph Batchik with hand-rolled cigars at Zuccaro's Banquet Hall in Chesterfield, Michigan.



Jeff Westbrook and his son Ian share a memorable cigar and Scotch on Father's Day at Jeff's home in Dana Point, California.



Mike Cook, McGregor Agan and Grant Hanson savor Montecristo No. 2 cigars as they sail around Washington's San Juan Islands for Mike's 60th birthday.



Captain Will Pederson of the Rockford Fire Department and firefighter Richard Mercado of the Fire Department of New York stroll with smokes in New York City.



Francis Ferrara and John Iannitto enjoy cigars at the wedding reception of Frank's daughter, Catherine, and John's son, Peter, in Haverhill, Massachusetts.



Brothers-in-law Mark Palmer and Brent Wilkins enjoy a pair of Padrón Serie 1926 80 Years while vacationing with their wives in Las Vegas, Nevada.



John Maxwell, Dave Maxwell, Billy Trego, Steve Maxwell, Nolan Maxwell, Joe Maxwell, Craig Maxwell and Elliot Joses gather at Mattei's Tavern in Los Olivos, California, to drink an assortment of fine Scotch alongside Romeo y Julieta cigars from Cuba in celebration of Nolan's marriage to his fiancée Autumn.

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5 FINGERPRINT ACCESS—TAPLOCK ONE

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6 HAUTE HAVANA—TASTE OF CUBA

Havana is a city that teems with *paladares*, private restaurants at which the innovative chefs prepare superb dishes, often while making heroic efforts to obtain ingredients in a country where the pickings are slim. The journalist Cynthia Carris Alonso, who has been traveling to Cuba for 25 years, sought out these chefs and recorded their recipes in the tome *A Taste of Cuba*, new from Apollo Publishers (\$35). “I went to all my favorite paladares,” she says. “A lot of the recipes are from the chef's heads.” The book also serves as a tour guide to Havana, with wonderful photographs.

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